Explorations of Educational Purpose 26

lisahunter
Elke Emerald
Gregory Martin

Participatory Activist Research in the Globalised World

Social Change Through the Cultural Professions

Springer

Participatory Activist Research in the Globalised World

EXPLORATIONS OF EDUCATIONAL PURPOSE

Volume 26

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ISSN 1875-4449 ISSN 1875-4457 (electronic)
ISBN 978-94-007-4425-7 ISBN 978-94-007-4426-4 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4426-4
Springer Dordrecht Heidelberg New York London

Library of Congress Control Number: 2012951320

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Preface

Central to this book by lisahunter, elke emerald and Gregory Martin is the commitment to the activist genre of social change in action research. There are many kinds of action research, and many are about changing practice but the literature shows that both change and practice can be weakly specified and limited in impact. The link to activism is important because it means that participants are not merely trying to improve their own individual or group practices, but also are committed to thinking about the purpose of their action research practice, as well as the purpose of the social practice in which they and others are also participants. Activist action researchers change themselves and their situation, making their work relevant, interesting, attractive and compelling to others.

Vital to the distinctiveness of this book is its very explicit recognition that social practices may be constituted differently in different kinds of institutional or community settings. Accordingly, many instructive examples from several fields of social practice are provided. Nevertheless, there are many ideas here which recognise that different social practices can have much in common. This does not mean that action research is best described as a method or methodology for doing research; it is always much more than that. It is about people bringing about change in their lives together. Because it is participatory, action research itself is a social practice with similar features to other social practices.

Practices such as education, social work, agriculture and health care are imbued with different 'sayings, doings and relatings' (Schatzki 2002). The sayings, doing and relatings of a social practice typically provide the legitimate concerns which bring action research participants together. What are legitimate concerns? Most usually, participants come together because they feel their work or community practice is unsatisfying in some way – not meeting their aspirations for social justice, inconsistent or incoherent, unsustainable in terms of workload or stress, weakly conscious of environmental concerns, racist, or gendered. Often community movements or movements within formal institutions create interest in new ways of doing things.

In the sense used here, activism builds on two themes which resonate through the history of action research. One theme is a strong, perhaps sometimes primary focus on changing social practice, not merely studying it. Studying first, acting later,

signifies the encroachment of the logic of positivism into thinking about social life, as if knowledge and action could be divorced from one another. This error is perhaps understandable. In the natural sciences, one often hears professional scientists saying that 'nothing should be done yet because the science is not complete'. This may tend to overstatement, but it certainly is not the way participants in social practice can afford to think. Their science must complement and constitute their practice as they conduct it – this is why we refer to action research itself as a practice for changing practice.

It follows from this reasoning that another theme for action research is the quest among participants to re-examine the ways in which their own practices, use of language, current patterns of work and working relationships in the situation conspire to prevent them from addressing their legitimate concerns. Current circumstances – sayings, doings and relatings, embedded by the pressures of work, habit, custom, ideology and belief may even prevent participants from seeing any need to change or from imagining realistic pathways to effect change. Unmasking constraints, creating possibilities, and acting together are fundamentals in activist action research.

It is appropriate to note that activism is sometimes contrasted with research – as if social action comes at the cost of reason. In activist action research, the legitimacy and validity of concerns and actions are tested among participants, in 'public spheres' guided by a commitment to 'communicative action' (Kemmis and McTaggart 2000, 2005). In this view, activism focuses on thoughtful and informed collaboration, certainly bringing together people with concerns about their work and its context to change things with appropriate urgency and effort, but with a rich understanding of what that entails as they bring about those changes.

Current practice is intimately linked to what has already been done and what might be done so it is necessary to understand the nature of practice and also pre-conditions which have shaped accepted ideas, activities and relationships. Action research invokes more than new understanding and includes new historical and theoretical awareness as well as personal consciousness in action. It helps participants to unravel and reveal sources of frustration and constraint to enable them to work through (or around) obstacles.

These themes have been evident in the work of several groups – many represented in this book. lisahunter, elke emerald and Gregory Martin have provided here several new distillations of theory and practice to extend this work. My own experience of the themes is their expression among activists and researchers associated with Deakin University action research theory and practice for more than a generation. Put slightly differently, two key features are (1) the central role of participants in researching and changing their own practices, and (2) the commitment among participants to make their own practices more coherent, just, rational, informed, satisfying and sustainable. It was the focus on these features which led Deakin researchers to action research, critical theory and critical social science and especially the work of Jurgen Habermas to inform and guide the theory and practice of action research. Important in this thinking was the commitment to social justice and its expression in both the social practice being changed and the social practice of action research itself. This view of social justice emerged in what Lather (1998) has called the critical traditions, all of those forms of thought and action expressed in labour

movements, peasant movements, community movements, feminism, post-colonialism and queer theory for example. Some leading participants in these movements were interested in critical theory because they drew inspiration from the critique of current practice, and also recognised through their critique that the constraints they faced as individuals were not always expressed as face-to-face politics, but also in deeply embedded ways of thinking, acting and interacting with each other. In other words, it was not just a matter of examining what was happening, but looking more deeply into practice to see its deeply embedded antecedents. This book also provides an introduction to those critical traditions which intending activist action researchers should learn from, join and extend.

Further comment about some action research theory and practice from the Deakin tradition will help to show how this book can make a contribution, not just as a way of approaching action research in action, but as a challenge to understand how the deep embeddedness of practice makes it so difficult to change in deliberate ways. Practice can sometimes be intractably resistant to change, sometimes unpredictably volatile. It is always both complex and manifold at the same time. My purpose is to flag some of the work done by Kemmis and McTaggart (2000, 2005) in the *Sage Handbooks of Qualitative Inquiry* and more recently. I will focus briefly on some key features and concepts to expand on the complexity of practice. These ideas can only be sketched here but references invite exploring their origins, extended nature and justification. I hope that this conceptual furniture assists readers to see the deep complexities of practice and in turn suggests the scope of what is at stake when a practice is prodded with efforts to change it.

Participation: The Handbook chapters presented a view of participation which was defined with reference to Jurgen Habermas' (1994, 1996) theory of public spheres, communicative action and communicative space. This conceptualisation outlined the way participation can be used to establish the legitimacy and validity of knowledge claims and action aimed at making social practices more coherent, just, rational, informed, satisfying and sustainable. There is little need to re-iterate this view of participation because implicit in the way activist action research is described is the idea of a forum where ideas and actions are tested for legitimacy and validity.

Practice: The Handbooks also anticipated a more comprehensive view of social practice which draws further on work by Habermas (1994, 1996) and Theodore Schatzki (2002). This view has two aspects, a more analytical interpretation of the nature of a practice coupled with a recognition of the fluidity of the interactions among the analytical categories developed. This provides a better way of thinking about the numerous elements of practices and how they are changed by action research – itself a social practice. Most important are the demands it makes on activist action research – it must be thoughtfully and comprehensively conceived and practiced.

These ideas about practice will surprise people who think of action research as an individual 'practitioner' trying to improve his or her own work – using the traditional plan, act, observe, and reflect cycle to reformulate plans and action and proceeding through a series of cycles, becoming a spiral of changing practice, understanding and the situation in which the practice occurs. This of course may be a very good thing to be doing, but it understates and isolates what is happening. For example, teaching, one expression of the practice of education, is both enabled

and constrained by many features which permeate classroom life. These features all help to constitute educational practice, but educators like me are forced to focus attention narrowly much of the time because teaching is a very engaging and spontaneous activity. It requires us to think, act and make judgments by habit or routine much of the time. Like many such practices, teaching involves much more than teaching, including meetings with colleagues or parents, meetings with students, attending conferences and other professional development, further study and interaction with the other ‘practitioners’ of education – principals, curriculum developers, system administrators, teacher educators, student teachers, researchers, psychologist, subject matter specialists and so on. All of these activities are bound together by a conceptual structure which links and describes these elements of educational theory and practice. The theory and practice of education is obviously not unique in this respect. People working in other professional or community practices will readily reel off the range of interactions, ideas and activities and the things that influence them. Activism which does not understand and heed this complexity, manifoldness, resistance and reflexivity risks grand failure or withering demise.

Practitioners in any practice already have quite a repertoire of practice with which to engage the world. However, a more disciplined reflective or research stance to their work requires a language about practice. We expect a nurse to exhibit recognisable skills, understandings and values – if he did not show them we would simply refuse an injection, for example. We have already implied a particular view of the concept practice by talking about a certain kind of practitioner, a nurse. Practice also can mean something extensive like agriculture, education, health or environmentalism. We also use the term for somewhat narrower actions like, farming, teaching or social work. So, we need a kind of conceptual lexicon – but not one cast in stone. What follows is a theory or conceptual architecture of a practice and therefore what might or might not change as a result of practitioners’ efforts.

These concepts of practice are summarised in Fig. 1 Change in the domains of practice. The figure is a summary and reconsideration of ideas developed in some detail in Kemmis and McTaggart (2000, 2005). The discussion following the table will help to explain why that scope is important. While we are in this analytical frame of mind it is important also to remember that practices are more than complex. All of the aspects of practice interact with each other so it is very difficult to change one aspect, farmers’ skills for example, without considering other aspects at the same time, such as extension of workers’ knowledge of local conditions. From a research perspective, this means that PA^{t}R must employ several research methods which tap into information in a broad realm of activity. This book provides a sound array of useful approaches to the gathering and interpreting of information.

The crucial message of the formulation is that bringing about change requires attention to the manifoldness of practice. Small changes in one aspect may produce (or require) major changes elsewhere. The well known ‘butterfly effect’ of chaos theory is a helpful analogy (Gleick 1988). However, it is important to understand that action research requires an approach which seeks to anticipate events so that deliberate change can be understood and new understandings acted upon as change unfolds.

INDIVIDUAL (subjectivity and agency)	*Knowledge*		
	Understandings	Skills	Values
	Activities and Practices		
	Sayings (communication)	Doings (production)	Relatings (organisation)
SOCIAL (mediating pre-conditions)	*Practice architectures (in a local site)*		
	Cultural/discursive orders and arrangements	Material/economic orders and arrangements	Social/political orders and arrangements
	Media (in general—across sites)		
	Language/discourses (in semantic space)	Work/activities (in physical space time)	Power/solidarity (in social space)

Fig. 1 Change in the domains of practice

Using this Figure we can describe more formally the ways in which social practices are constructed and contextualised. Some examples from education are used in the following text to help to show more concretely what is meant by the terms.

We can identify several 'domains of practice' in the following way. We conceptualise the domains of practice at the individual level, the realm of individual subjectivity and agency in terms of knowledge and as activities and practices; and at the social level in terms of practice architectures (in a local site) and as media (in general, across sites) – the mediating pre-conditions which frame both constraints and new possibilities.

At the individual level, when people embark on a change in practice (beginning at the top of Fig. 1) their state of knowledge will change as they develop new understandings from their reading and dialogue with others. They will acquire new skills, and it is likely also that their values will change as they learn. Changes in their own activities and practices will be constituted through new sayings (content and methods of communication about their educational practice with students, colleagues and others). Their doings (or production – teaching, curriculum development, assessment) will change, as will their relatings (patterns of organisation and relationships with respect to students, parents and others). Schatzki (2002, p. 71) argues that sayings, doings and relatings 'hang together' in any social practice in comprehensible ways as an expression of characteristic purposes of the practice. Professional practices such as those in education, health, architecture and so on constitute one kind of

practice; community practices such as environmentalism, neighbourhood watch, cricket, or choral singing are another.

At the social level, what is achieved will be a function of the mediating social pre-conditions that are in place – consisting of orders and arrangements which shape what can happen. The existing cultural/discursive order and arrangements of the school, community, school system, classroom and staffroom will provide both opportunities and constraint for change, but will also be amenable to change themselves, probably necessarily if changes are to be effected and embedded. The material/economic orders and arrangements of the setting will interact similarly – how resources are distributed and how people spend their time and emotional energy will be key influences on what can be accomplished. Current social/political orders and arrangements will exert an impact here too. In turn, these will engage current and possible forms of political life. Participants come to these orders and arrangements, which have become settled over time, but they are not permanently fixed and can, usually must, be changed to effect educational change. The social media of language/discourses, work/activities and power/solidarity provide the ways in which changes in social practice are expressed.

Participants in activist action research express their professional identities or identities as activist citizens through their agreed ways of using language, the kinds of work and activities which engage them, and a sense of belonging and solidarity and confidence through their realisation and accrual of evidence that their lives and work are becoming more coherent, just, rational, informed, satisfying and sustainable.

Changing practice and helping others to change practice is the goal of this book. The resources and challenges it provides create a sound basis for working with others in action research. The contents, perhaps including this preface, constitute a theory of how this might be accomplished. You are invited to enjoy the community of activist participatory action researchers to explore these ideas in the community and professional practices of your choosing.

Robin McTaggart

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Acknowledgements

This work is the result of a queered collaboration. Its genesis was in the context of a wider group that faced job losses or changes due to institutional disenfranchisement. The personal and professional suffering we experienced and witnessed made us even more resolute in completing this project – an activist act in itself!

We give thanks to those who supported us through bigger life projects such as births, ill health, physical relocation for each of the team, job changes for each of the team, new relationships and new lives.

We acknowledge each other in our tenacity and in believing the project was worth doing. Thanks also to our publisher representative Marianna Pascale; producer A. Lakshmi Praba; preface author Robin McTaggart; reviewers Michelle Fine, Richard Tinning, Noeline Alcorn, Peter McLaren; and PAtR Figure 12.1 designer, Michael Collins.

In memory of Joe Kincheloe and the work he carried out, triggered and inspired.

lisahunter: I met action research in the early 1990s with Richard Tinning as my supervisor in the distance Deakin University Masters programme, a place that is still remembered for its critical education (see Tinning and Sirna 2011) with academics such as Wilfred Carr and Stephen Kemmis on staff at the time. My masters, an action research project in bringing about curriculum change in my school, gave me the opportunity to experience praxis and understand the world of politics in curriculum change and schooling politics. Later, being a part of the participatory action research group in Brisbane and continuing to work with scholars such as Richard Tinning continued to inspire me to consider the potential of action research, critical theory and related theories in my work. I have been disappointed with not making the social justice changes I felt necessary in schooling contexts, and now education more broadly, but continue to try. I am not sure I am any closer! Even my attempts to control my own name in this book has met with structural barriers that procluded the correct representation of my name as lisahunter. The symbolic violence, albeit minute is illustrative of our lack of agency at times.

I was fortunate to work with a group of social justice-oriented scholars at UQ (Lisa Patel Stevens, Allan Luke) and then GU (Peter Renshaw, Gregory Martin,

Stephen Thorpe, Annette Woods, Elizabeth Hirst, Helena Austin, Lorelei Carpenter and Ali Sammel). It was exciting and generative, helping me to develop a deeper awareness for activist research methodology. So, I thank them for their provocative discussions. A big thanks also to my two colleagues, elke and Gregory, who have been personally and professionally supportive of the book project, sticking with it through the many trials and tribulations called life.

Gregory Martin: I am indebted to a great many people who have guided, inspired, and reassured me throughout both my personal and academic life. Most directly, I wish to acknowledge all of my teachers and ‘critical friends’ who have supported my engagement with issues of education and social justice both intellectually and emotionally, including my co-authors. I can trace my activist roots back to my mother Linda Rogers. But I consider myself to be very fortunate to have ongoing support of activist allies such as Annette Woods, Kris Gutierrez, Peter Renshaw, Allan Luke, Shirley Steinberg, Beth Swadener, Peter McLaren, Tom Griffiths, Dave Hill, Glenn Rikowski, Benji Chang, lisahunter and elke emerald as well as the encouragement and advice of my colleagues at UTS including Keiko Yasukawa, Tony Brown, Nina Burridge, Ann Reich, Donna Rooney and Kitty Te Riele. I also want to acknowledge my Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentors such as Chris Evans, Lyndon Murphy, Dale Kerwin and Martin Nakata for their guidance, patience and solidarity. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my partner Donna Houston as well as my family and friends who have not only sustained me during this time but continue to make the world glow with possibility, including my precious daughter Quinn. Finally, this book would not have been possible without the inspiration of Joe Kincheloe.

elke emerald: I am a relative newcomer to AR, and I came in a side door. I was invited to teach in a double credit AR course in order to broaden my own knowledge and have the opportunity to work with colleagues I valued and admired, lisahunter and Gregory Martin amongst them. Within a year, in the wash up of a tornado that swept through our institution, the ground had shifted significantly, and I was given the opportunity to take over the course altogether. My predecessor teaching the course was generous in his support, as were my colleagues, and my action research training shifted from overdrive to hyperdrive as I confronted the daunting practicalities of taking a large group of graduate students on a journey from never having done any research whatsoever, to understanding AR, conceiving a project in the context of a workplace placement, refining a proposal, enacting an AR project and writing an academic paper – in one semester! As such, my politics and idealism for and around PA^{t}R have always been embedded in the very practical constraints of teaching.

I thank my colleague Stephen Thorpe for his support in my early AR apprenticeship; he provided a powerful springboard, propelling me in to this world. I thank my colleagues lisahunter and Gregory Martin, who have enthusiastically continued to play, long after our institutional geographies were rendered asunder. They have pushed me deeper in to exploration of the politics of my actions and forced me to (try to) match my teaching practical action with those politics.

Thank you too, to those graduate students who allowed little snippets of their work to be on display here as teaching examples.

As always too, I thank Prof. Geoff Williams and Prof. Peter Freebody – the ubermentors, who, in different ways, set me on the academic path by simply assuming I belonged there.

An earlier version of Chapter 9 *LEAPing into youth work:* $PA^{t}R$ *in a cultural profession* appeared in Martin, G. (2000). Don't LEAP into this: Student resistance in labour market programmes. *Educational Action Research Journal, 8*(3), 533–548.

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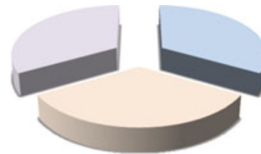
Abbreviations

AR Action research
CRT Critical race theory
CT Critical theory
PAR Participatory action research
PA^{t}R Participatory activist research
PA^{t}R^{r} Participatory activist researcher

Chapter 1
Introduction

Book overview



This book is an introduction to the issues, debates and practices relating to *Participatory Activist Research* (PA^{t}R). PA^{t}R belongs to the research family of action research (AR). The emphasis of this book is on helping new and practicing cultural professionals to understand the complex and diverse nature of the broader action research tradition and to develop systematic ways of engaging in it. It is intended to help readers step beyond a ‘how-to’ text to also tackle the questions of why, who for and when? It is intended for the *activist* cultural professional who has an interest in understanding and facilitating *social change* through research. PA^{t}R is one of many activist tools that the cultural professional might call on, including direct action, campaigning, group work, education, liaison and networking, planning and participation, case work and client organising, skilling, and leadership development.

Education is a human practice for the enhancement of society. Education creates new knowledge and new ways of doing things. The chapters in this book are designed to support your education as an early career professional. It is written for those in

lisahunter et al., *Participatory Activist Research in the Globalised World: Social Change Through the Cultural Professions*, Explorations of Educational Purpose 26, DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4426-4_1, © Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2013

what are sometimes referred to as the caring professions such as teaching, nursing, youth work, social work and community development. It is also written for those in government departments whose work is to link with these professionals and for those in the community who are endeavouring to make a difference in a collective way. Education and research are not just for those in formal institutions such as schools or universities, but rather, education and research are mechanisms for social change through social action based on informed decision-making for those willing and able to participate. This book is about you being a researcher, an educator, a participant in change and an activist.

PA^{t}R is a collectively written book that pulls together the histories, experiences and pathways travelled by three academic activists. This does not mean that individual voices are subsumed within a single, authoritative voice or narrative. Given our different subject positions, life histories and unique stories, the authors differ in many ways. However, what connects the different elements of our lives is a deep and enduring commitment to social justice that is inspired by an engagement with alternative ideas, processes and futures. This is where the political focus of the book becomes clearer. We believe that the act of research is not just to understand the world but also to work within it in order to change it, that is, to change social structures, institutions and cultures. In this sense, we believe action research opens up a space for creative and imaginative possibilities as a group of individuals come together to delve deeply into an issue or problem that is relevant to their life world contexts. Like Stephen Kemmis (2010), we say 'the principle justification for action research is that it makes a direct contribution to transformative action and to *changing history*' (p. 425 italics in original).

Collaborative research of this nature requires a high degree of intimacy and trust that can be only achieved through ongoing dialogue. In action research, the creative power of dialogue takes place in the cycles of planning, acting, collecting data, reflection and deciding how the next step of the process should continue, or not. It is through dialogue that the participants listen to and learn from each other in order to make decisions and take action. With this mind, we argue that action research involves taking greater responsibility for the emotions, feelings, actions and lives of each other. This is one of the features that distinguish action research from other approaches in that the researcher tends to work 'inside' rather than 'outside' a community, for example, as an external consultant who provides 'expert' advice. If you happen to be invited to support or participate in action research as an 'outsider', it is important that this role is reflexively negotiated in a way that is culturally and politically sensitive to the local context in all its dimensions. This requires a degree of immersion in the world of the participants so that you are alert to how everyone is feeling as well as the implications of any power differentials particularly if the research situation is sensitive, controversial or threatening (Brydon-Miller 2008).

Spanning many different issues and locales, we suggest that PA^{t}R is a form of 'prefigurative politics' (Graeber 2002) that aims to create new or alternative futures in the present (Poldervarrt 2009). By learning how to listen and take care of each other, the focus is on personally and collectively enacting the changes we want to see in the world on a day-to-day basis – even if such efforts are messy and imperfect.

Although participatory action research (PAR) is valorised as a vehicle for social change, it often has origins in small-scale experiments that are characterised by localised, face-to-face intimacy and personal interaction. Within such settings, everyday or personal experiences, emotional dynamics and social relations are all central to building the capacities of individuals to learn from each other through social action. In this sense, feminist geographers such as Cahill (2007) argue that 'the personal is political' particularly when PAR is attentive to the power of these emotions and relations in its activist work. Drawing upon diverse sources of insight and inspiration including the ideas of the Brazilian educator, activist and theorist Paulo Freire, Cahill's (2007) research highlights the ways in which PAR can create pedagogical spaces for new subjectivities and identities to emerge – along with 'in-the-making' imaginaries and politics.

Research for us then is about the renegotiation of power relations and working as what Sachs (2000) calls an 'activist professional', that is, one who aims to change the world: whether it is about improving classroom practice with the help of students, improving working conditions of mental health-care nurses in collaboration with other nurses and patients, changing community processes to ensure safer spaces for young people or changing the trajectory of politics, including the imposition of policies and ideologies. In an era where changes are being led by the ideology of corporate managerialism, new forms of organisational control have impacted on the construction of professional identity (Sachs 1999). Changes in the 'occupational culture' of organisations, including the public sector, mean that values of collegiality and collaboration are being progressively undermined. In the current climate, what Ball (1998) terms the 'discourse of performativity' encourages the construction of new forms of professional subjects, people, that are individualistic, competitive and entrepreneurial.

At times, it is hard not to feel a romanticised nostalgia for the good old days. At breakneck speed, the culture of performativity has pervaded all corners of society and reconfigured what it means to be a 'good' professional. Ball (1998) details the dangers of its instrumental drive including the way it has eroded or nudged out 'altruistic' concerns to do with democracy, solidarity and social justice. Indeed, Blackmore (2004) argues that the focus of the caring professional is no longer on 'advocacy and social and political action' but rather on improving organisational efficiency and effectiveness (p. 191). Within the unreflective or uncritical praxis of the familiar, everyday or habitual (that is, of habit) the emphasis in the contemporary workplace is on compliance and submissiveness – reinforced through an audit and surveillance culture that is narrowly results-based or outcomes-based (Blackmore 2004). For example, in schooling, accountability through high-stakes testing has grown throughout the world, and the performance of teachers is increasingly judged on students' standardised test scores. In Los Angeles, Rigoberto Ruelas Jr., a 39-year-old fifth grade teacher in South Los Angeles who went beyond the classroom and 'always reached out to the toughest kids' became depressed and committed suicide, allegedly over his teacher performance ranking on a Los Angeles Times website (Zavis and Barbosa 2010). In the rankings, Hoag from the Associated Press (2010) reported, 'Ruelas scored "average" in getting his students up to acceptable

levels in English, but "less effective" in math, and "less effective" overall. The school itself ranked as "least effective" in raising test scores, and only five of Miramonte's 35 teachers were ranked as high as average'. There is no recognition in such narrow measures for the real effect of Ruelas' work, and the school's work, with some of the most alienated and disenfranchised students, the so-called toughest kids.

As Ball (1998) and Blackmore (2004) note above, this emphasis on performativity according to narrow audit criteria reverberates throughout what we here call the *cultural professions*. You will, no doubt, be able to identify examples in your own context. Given this overall dire situation, how do we construct our identities as something 'other', or different to what is demanded institutionally, so that we are not complicit in what Freire (1985) termed a 'culture of silence', where it is safer to look the other way rather than act? Such measurement regimes *are* being met with grass roots and organised resistance, including by those communities most affected, such as young people. For example, although the youth are often pathologised as disengaged and politically apathetic, Fox et al. (2010) document some inspiring examples of critical youth engagement enacted through a youth participatory action research (YPAR) and youth organising approach. We can take inspiration from, and do justice to, such examples of resistance and other forms of activism. Sachs (2000) argues that what is needed is a move towards 'new and more active forms' of professionalism that are informed by 'new kinds of affiliation and collaboration' (pp. 80–87). Clearly, the obstacles for achieving this through praxis are many and great, but a need exists to create 'spaces for action and debate' (Sachs 2000, p. 93). Having conceptualised a new course of action, Sachs (2000), writing in the context of education, develops a protocol for the activist professional that is informed by the following principles:

- Inclusiveness, rather than exclusiveness, that is, of teachers, academics, union officials, systems people and employers as well as parents and other community groups
- Collective and collaborative action
- Effective communication of aims, expectations, etc.
- Recognition of the expertise of all parties involved
- Creating an environment of trust and mutual respect
- Being responsive and responsible
- Acting with passion
- Experiencing pleasure and fun (p. 87)

What first brought us together and became the impetus for this book was an interest in the cultural politics of education and the politics of researching education. We worked together in a course called *Action Research Project*. All three of us had undertaken research in situations characterised by inequality, and we asked whether research could 'empower', that is, equip participants to successfully challenge the inequalities, disadvantage, oppression or hardship they experienced. Research is often conducted *on* powerless people rather than *with* and *for* them, and we had many questions about how our own work could be described. All too often, conventional approaches to research do not lead to action for social change. This is because

in order to maintain 'objectivity', traditional researchers distance themselves from the 'researched', who are thereby reduced to passive objects rather than active subjects. As activist researchers, we worry about this type of insulated 'Ivory Tower' research as it is in danger of having little value in solving the 'real-world' problems of diverse communities. However, while we challenge traditional research values of distance, neutrality and objectivity, we are not advocating an anything-goes approach. Rather, we agree with Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), who argues that the value of research should be determined by the extent that it contributes to struggles for social justice for indigenous peoples and other marginalised groups. So, taking our cue from the ethos of the activist professional, we are concerned with how research and inquiry can be made more useable for all those involved. Our own orientation to action research is influenced by critical theory's attention to social justice. And we are interested in how critical research methodologies that connect with real-world people and real-world struggles can create and mobilise identities and knowledge for critique, cultural action and social change. As well, we are attempting to expose early career and pre-service professionals to the sort of praxis they might be involved in to make the differences they dreamed of when choosing their profession.

Our frustrations over well meaning early career and pre-service professionals 'not getting it' and therefore reproducing the very oppressions they were attempting to eliminate led to more questions over what something like action research had to offer. In teaching our action research courses, we recognised the superficiality of change in our students' practices. We were also frustrated by the institutional constraints with which we and they had to deal. Our reflections led to a commitment to try to capture some of the ideas, difficulties, practices, problems, processes and, hopefully, inspirations for future professionals and community activists to follow.

Action research is an umbrella term that has come to represent an array of action-based and activist practices. One can see why activists in governments, schools, communities, hospitals and prisons have become aware of its potential as both a means for identifying and enacting change processes. We note though that having found a modest niche for activism in everyday practice, tension and conflict often exist between conventional understandings of change (aligned with a desire for personal transformation and political pragmatism in our immediate contexts) and more radical or coercive forms of collective politics in civil society. However, as a political entry point, the distinction between personal transformation and radical change operates as a false distinction or opposition and works to obfuscate new ways or paths forward. What matters is that the thousands of everyday small struggles for incremental or pragmatic change do not necessarily foreclose the possibility of radical or systemic change. Indeed, small wins or victories are important as they often build capacity for larger struggles by providing those 'others' struggling against social injustice (however 'big' or 'small') the confidence to fight for more.

Within existing regimes of managerial and occupational control, the struggle for change often means critically reworking what it means to be a professional to include greater participation in the civic realm. This is difficult given the way professional identity is constantly made and remade in and through everyday embodied

practices in hierarchical organisations such as schools, hospitals, social welfare agencies, and other community and institutional settings. Cultural workers (amongst whom we include teachers, social workers, youth workers, education administrators and so forth) are encouraged to bring their politics and practices into line with existing and evolving standards and market models of governance. As such, notions of professional competence and the evaluation of professional and pedagogical knowledge and skills are bounded by these existing forms. In effect, the ritualised drive for performativity, normalisation and continual improvement may deepen a false professionalism that makes any kind of deviation a transgression that is frowned upon or even a violation that amounts to a punishable offence. For example, research ‘whistle blowers’ who speak up in the public interest rather than remain silent when they identify practices that are unethical or illegal often encounter obstacles from bureaucratic indifference to even retaliation in the form of victimisation or dismissal. Spurred on by the logic of neo-liberalism and market incentives (e.g. bonuses and performance pay), cultural workers in a professional service environment are in danger of being reduced to providing the desired service to ‘clients’ as efficiently and productively as possible.

To work against the grain, cultural professionals need to infuse their work and lives with both the pedagogical and the political even when this creates tension with efficiency, profit and simplistic measures of productivity. With a view to rescuing the concept of human agency, that is, an individual’s ability to consciously act, Giroux (1988) argues that making ‘the pedagogical more political and the political more pedagogical’ (p. 127) enables individuals to evaluate and change existing knowledge and power relations rather than just accept them. Action research, in many of its forms and particularly the form we describe in this book, provides a theoretically and methodologically rigorous way to engage with change in the ways Giroux articulates here.

Action or Activism?

It is easier to criticise or comment when sitting on the sidelines than it is when fully engaged in the real-world trenches of social justice work. Confronted by the moral and legal authority of an employer, cultural workers struggling with others to produce change will need to develop intellectual confidence and what Giroux (1989) referred to as ‘civic courage’ in order to straddle or bridge the professional/activist divide (p. 131). In the space of everyday life, civic courage is the commitment to redefine one’s identity and practice with compassion for the plight of ‘others’. Faced with the urgency of the requirement for change, compassion is not simply aimed at understanding the relation between self and ‘other’, but rather embodies a radical openness to possibility, combined with a willingness to reach out and *act* (Giroux 1989). Rather than working in isolation, this means linking action sites (be it hospitals, education, social services, prisons and so on) with other sites of struggle to build capacity for substantive social change. In our daily work and the search for alternative strategies

and interventions, an ‘activist professional’ identity ‘is not something that will come naturally’ but is rather forged in collective action to challenge forms of authority and control that perpetuate inequalities and injustice (Sachs 1999). The activist professional identity entails shifting from disengaged cynicism to activism. Importantly, amongst cultural workers, including some found in your profession or community, there is a long tradition of activism and organised protest to productively rework power relations. The work of unions is an example of an organised form of activism within professions, but we do not discount, by any means, the potency of less formalised or structured activism that individuals and groups engage in. And given that burnout is a real problem this alternative source of meaning and solidarity can allow for creativity, long-term sustainability and radical hope. Indeed, living a life committed to social justice can counter the routine drudgery of work and be a source of inspiration and joy. We can no longer afford to be cocooned in mystification or the (comfortable) cage of the everyday but rather need to mobilise that living tradition of activism and reach out and engage with community.

By and large, the ideologically charged and distinctly grass-roots character of action research influenced by Orlando Fals Borda and Paulo Freire in Latin America carries with it something of the mythical quality. Although this is changing through the actively engaged efforts of critical scholars such as Cammarota and Fine (2008), there are not enough examples of the actual application of this radical tradition that bridge the gap between theory and practice in real-life contexts in the existing literature. The danger then is that those who turn to action research as a mode of political praxis, through want of adequate guidance, can default to a fallback position that is technical, procedural or step by step rather than a more politically robust experimental approach. The paucity of exemplars can also provide legitimacy and justification for an unimaginative and conservative ‘what works’ discourse and practice (Abbey 2003). There is no ‘one-shot’ magic bullet to ‘empower’ individuals and communities to take action to solve complex social problems. And ultimately, what you get out of action research and this book is up to you. We recognise the importance of providing guidance and support, including information that is useful to your learning about how to achieve success in creating and managing change. And certainly, action research is not a random or accidental process. What distinguishes action research from other approaches is that it is a systematic form of praxis that begins from what you learn from the reconnaissance phase of your research (Tripp 1996). Contrary to many other approaches, action research is also different in that all the participants can be key to identifying problems, collecting and analysing data and implementing solutions – as they explore and express the values that are important to their lives.

Historically, action research found a home in education and particularly as professional development. It has since diversified and grown livelier, addressing issues of youth, sexuality, gender, ethnicity and class in the myriad of cultural professions. Here in this book, we introduce participatory activist research (PA^{t}R) as a methodological process that ties individual forms of development to new forms of collective action in order to challenge the many forms of social injustice. From a

relational perspective, PA^{t}R is values driven. It is a methodology for social change. In this sense, compared to classical or 'traditional' approaches, PA^{t}R is also a more dynamic, open, recursive, chaotic and unpredictable process. Unfortunately, it can be also reduced to just another vehicle for normalisation by reinscribing the status quo (Jordan 2009; Martin 2000). Often, but not always, this is traceable to the lack of clarity about the *theoretical* assumptions and *value systems* that guide the researcher's preconceptions and interests. From conception to implementation, these tacit worldviews, dispositions and commitments are mutually self-reinforcing and inevitably shape the purposes and practical outcomes of the research process. PA^{t}R is our way of directly addressing the calls to a revisiting and renewing of the emancipatory and critical (Kemmis 2010; Kinsler 2010) by offering a way to explicitly 'write in' and 'act in' the values, relationships and politics of your research. Even with the best intent, the failure to decolonise the underlying ideological impulse of the enterprise (be it education, health care, social work and so on) that administers our professional imaginations, can (re)produce a narrowly individualistic and pragmatic paradigm. This is precisely what PA^{t}R is working against. PA^{t}R is an open and interconnected approach, one that is unashamed of its political and ideological foundations and is constructed through relationships to the 'other' as defined by shared place-based interests.

Pat Thomson (2002) notes that 'doing justice' is forever a daunting task. The very idea seems to require extraordinary tenacity and capabilities, to demand efforts beyond the possible. Yet despite what appear to be insurmountable difficulties and obstacles, Thomson's conviction that social justice reflects both the means and the outcome for each and every act of learning remains unassailable. Expanding on her concept of social justice in the schooling context, she writes that:

> realism should not translate into lowered expectations for individual children and young people. Teachers and schools must act as if every [student] can learn what matters for them to have equal life chances, as well as take up the things that interest them. And while teachers and schools might be disappointed when this does not miraculously occur within the time frame of the annual or three-year plan, they should not be regarded or regard themselves as failing – they are engaged in an ongoing intellectual and emotional struggle against the odds. Nor should realism equate with the abandonment of the imaginary of a just and caring society. It is these dreams that provide us with hope and with ways of being (ontologies) and ways of understanding the world (epistemologies) and how it might be (axiologies): it is with and from this standpoint that we interrogate and make judgments about our everyday practices as well as that of the school system. (pp. 182–183)

PA^{t}R works axiologically with this notion of 'doing justice' by and for those oppressed by the practices that need changing. It is important to acknowledge that PA^{t}R is clearly informed by elements of a particular form of action research, by critical theory (CT), and by participatory action research (PAR). So we do not claim our work to be 'brand new'. However, what is emphasised perhaps differently from other nomenclature is the part you play as an *activist* to 'make the difference': hence the acronym PA^{t}R to emphasise activ*ist*. In summary, we suggest you are a participant, working within a collective for shared understandings and action. You are an activist,

with your politics honest and explicit, working deliberatively for change. You are a researcher within a specific context where being informed by theory and practice means they come together as praxis rather than being kept separate and distinct. This book intends to introduce you to PA^{t}R to take up Pat Thomson's suggestion of 'doing justice'.

This book is structured in three sections:

The first group of chapters focuses upon the bigger picture that informs the practice of PA^{t}R:

- Firstly, there is a description and history of the broader practice of AR in Chap. 2.
- The theoretical orientations that inform AR and PA^{t}R such as critical theory are outlined in Chap. 3.
- The philosophical orientations that inform PA^{t}R and your practice of PA^{t}R are examined in Chap. 4.

The second group of chapters focuses on:

- Firstly, the methodological considerations you will need to take into account in your PA^{t}R work in Chap. 5.
- Including the methods for constructing field texts, sometimes referred to as data, in Chap. 6.
- How such field texts might be analysed to construct research texts to make sense of what is going on in Chap. 7.[1]

The third group of chapters focuses on some of the 'how-to' questions:

- Chapter 8 highlights some of the difficulties, limitations and cautions when doing PA^{t}R.
- Chapter 9 acts as a *summary* of the 'how to' and acts as a useful checklist as you progress through your project and work.
- Chapter 10 illustrates PA^{t}R with an extended example of PA^{t}R in practice.
- Chapter 11 then lists some example activist research in different cultural professions.

[1]A note about the terms we use: In Chap. 5, we use the term *field texts* to name what some might call data collection or data construction. We have borrowed this term from Clandinin and Connelly (2000) to quite deliberately, through the use of this language, draw attention to the processes that information from the field of research are subject to, in their journey from being just that, information, to being considered 'data'. In Chap. 7, we refer to methods of *research text* construction (aka data analysis) to again draw explicit attention to the shaping of information into 'data' and the deliberate manipulation of this data in 'analysis'. We make these naming moves to draw neophyte researchers' attention to their own manipulation of the scene. As you will read in coming chapters, we do not consider knowledge an 'objective' thing, waiting outside ourselves to be discovered; rather, knowledge is a situated and positioned construct of the participants on the scene. Hence, we use these terms to be open and explicit about our position with regards to knowledge and to remind ourselves constantly of this.

- Chapter 12 makes suggestions on how you might publicly report or re-present the work of your research project, whether it is in the form of an academic work, an official report, a community presentation or other forms designed to meet the needs of the audience with whom you are communicating.
- Chapter 13 concludes by revisiting some of the key features of PA^{t}R in practice.

Each chapter begins with a *Graphic Organiser* to orientate you to where the chapter fits in the book. There are also some *Keywords* that you might follow up in other sources. The focus of this chapter is then presented. A set of *Guiding/Clarifying Questions* close each chapter as a summary of the main points but also a check for your developing knowledge. As this book is designed to be an introduction to PA^{t}R, we have also provided a list of sources, *Extending Your Reading*, that you might go to for further explanation or more detail on elements of the chapter. We hope the contents and structure are useful in aiding your early work as a participatory activist researcher, work that can be further informed through a myriad of literature, websites (e.g. see http://nurse-activism.com/) and organisations (e.g. http://www.yanq.org.au/workforce/51-practice-of-youth-work-research/2479-education-and-social-change-activism-in-partnership-with-young-people-1). We look forward to witnessing your work as an activist professional.

Guiding/Clarifying Questions

1. What do you understand by what we say in the introduction, 'Education and research are not just for those in formal institutions such as schools or universities but rather, education and research are mechanisms for social change, social action based upon informed decision-making for those willing and able to participate?' (p. 2)
2. What is an activist cultural professional?
3. What is meant by corporate managerialism, occupational culture and a discourse of performativity?
4. What is meant by the term praxis?

Extending Your Reading

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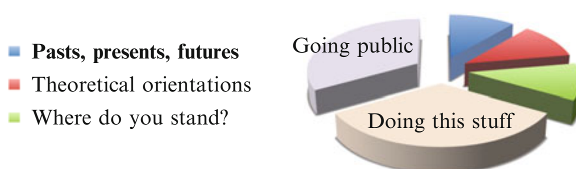
Part A
The Bigger Picture

Chapter 2
Pasts, Presents and Futures: An Overview of the Action Research Family

Section A: The bigger picture



What Is Action Research?

PA^{t}R is a member of the action research (AR) family. AR is an umbrella term that includes participatory research, critical action research, new critical collaborative ethnography, action science, reflective practitioner action, action learning, industrial action research, classroom action research, soft systems approaches, collaborative inquiry, living theory approach, community-based participatory research and critical participatory action research. Many of these terms are used interchangeably, which causes confusion amongst academics and practitioners from all disciplines and professions. In this chapter, we give a brief overview of AR's salient features and then the historical moves, forces and moments that formed AR as a field today. In doing this, we hope to contribute to a genealogical understanding of its different meanings, ethical commitments and possibilities. Given that what is understood to be AR is named differently in different contexts, this chapter will include consideration of an operational typology to distinguish between approaches and practices.

The various differences have been the grist of heated debates that have erupted into intermittent warfare between scholars (for example, Elliott 2005; Carr and Kemmis 2005). Given AR's discursive openness, there have also been efforts at

lisahunter et al., *Participatory Activist Research in the Globalised World: Social Change Through the Cultural Professions*, Explorations of Educational Purpose 26,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4426-4_2, © Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2013

establishing peaceful coexistence between the different approaches and opening up new areas of research. We seek not to engage in warfare, nor to get bogged down in the finer details of these muddy battlefields and their participants. Rather, our purpose here is to identify differences in order to explore the relations between the different strands of AR. In short, AR is a diverse, exciting and constantly evolving methodology, and it is helpful for participants to keep abreast of developments through journals such as *Action Research, Action Research International, Educational Action Research,* and *Systemic Practice and Action Research*.

Traditional research methods could be described as 'extractive' (Pain and Francis 2003) in that the 'experts' extract information from the site and construct knowledge. Such colonial extractive methods do nothing to enhance the capacities or aspirations of the participants on the scene, be it the clients and staff of a social facility, the students and teachers in a class, the patients and staff in a hospital or a community group. Such research is characterised by a one-way flow of information, treating the community as 'data plantations' (Mutua and Swadener 2004). Traditional research methods do not try to involve the participants or develop their own capacity to initiate action or respond to change by, for example, developing the research skills of the participants or involving them in data collection, analysis and reporting. In this way, the community under study is not a full or equal partner in the research. Knowledge flows away from the community, oftentimes into the academic community. As in all things, academic research has its own web of power relations. All too often, the knowledge produced as a collective good by a community is appropriated for private purposes, albeit under the auspices of scholarship or good intentions.

The politics of good intentions can be patronising, oppressive and even offensive to communities. For example, it is not enough to simply be aware of cultural protocols when undertaking research with First Nations communities and thereby imagine that the research itself will be free of patronising or oppressive politics. Although it offers the veneer of legality and ethical action, a superficial compliance mentality means that institutional guidelines and cultural protocols are used to access First Nations knowledge in a tokenistic and exploitative way. Acknowledging and observing cultural and customary protocols with First Nations communities involves more than ticking a box. Rather, it is about what Martin (2003) argues is learnt through a deeper and more complex set of cultural politics based on recognition, respect, obligation, reciprocity and relationality. Maori scholar and activist Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) has written powerfully about the ways in which research is complicit with the perpetuation of European colonialism, and Margaret Cargo et al. (2008) ask whether the democratic ideal of participatory research can ever be achieved. Scholars such as Smith (1999) have discussed the ways in which research can be more respectful and useful in non-appropriative ways to the communities themselves. Researchers from outside the community should be aware of the political commitment involved when engaging in decolonised and collaborative research.

Within the wider 'material turn' taking place in the humanities and social sciences, AR has experienced a revival of sorts alongside other practice-orientated and performative ways of doing research (Bennet and Joyce 2010; Hicks and Beaudry

2010; Madison and Hamera 2006). This recent movement towards the 'material' or 'empirical' represents a radical departure from the textual politics of research associated with the earlier postmodern or 'linguistic turn'. In a certain sense, it could be said that a growing sense of dissatisfaction with purely culturalist or textual methodologies led to a renewed interest in alternative or unconventional approaches that promote more relational, performative and down-to-earth or embodied forms of praxis. However, AR has been around for a while, and its evolving nature and accomplishments are well documented.

At the same time, different strands of AR have evolved as specialised areas of disciplinary research in the context of the academy. This represents a missed opportunity for researchers to learn from each other by bringing together theoretical insights and practice-based experiences. At a more generic level, the perhaps inadvertent use of ambiguous, vague or non-specific language has also confused the different types and fostered definitional creep in the ever-expanding concept of AR. There has been a tendency amongst practitioners in a variety of contexts to identify any kind of common problem-solving or reflective activity that involves elements of collaboration and feedback as a form of AR (Hart and Bond 1995). Researchers such as Wortley (1996) argue that the confusion surrounding what constitutes AR is a result of the 'plethora of definitions' and the tendency to naively conflate ideals and language with what usually amounts to little more than 'a probable eclectic individually conceived framework' (http://www.scu.edu.au/schools//gcm/ar/arr/arow/rwortley.html). Even if well intended, when these definitions get collapsed, the political difference between 'activities' and 'action' also gets confused (Noffke and Brennan 1997).

At its broadest, AR is a research approach that works *with* a community on a common topic of interest, that is, engaging the community in finding answers and applying those answers to the point of concern. Writing in the context of educational AR and with reference to the development of AR at Deakin University in Australia during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, Kemmis articulates this broad imperative of AR:

> [we had] the sense that we should not stray too far 'outside' or 'above' the lifeworlds of those whose lives we researched. We recognised that we had a moral and political duty to, and that we should have solidarity with, those whom conventional educational research called 'subjects' and treated as 'objects' (Kemmis 2011, p. 90).

Types of AR and Key Features of AR

Clearly, it is outside the scope of this book to cover all the definitions for AR. We will broadly and briefly cover some of the major ones below. For now, we just want to state that the most common or essential characteristic of all AR approaches is that they:

- Attempt to understand an issue or problem in context (reflect).
- Devise a plan (plan).
- Act on that plan (act).

- Describe the effects of that action (observe).
- Then review the plan and its effects (reflect) in order to inform the next cycle of planning, action, observation and so on.

That is, AR intimately links research to practice such that each informs the other. Action, or practice, talks with theory – this practice/action has been called praxis. To some degree, all forms of AR involve some form of participation of the people on the scene, say the students and teachers in a class, the clients and staff of a social facility or the patients and staff in a hospital. Further, all forms of AR are committed to the improvement of practice, be it in a juvenile detention centre, a human services government department, a classroom, a re-entry programme for addiction patients, a hospital ward or a local community action group.

Within this common understanding of AR, there is rich diversity and multiplicity of approaches, and typologies abound. For example, in education, Shirley Grundy (1982) identifies three modes of AR: technical, practical and emancipatory. These are informed by different philosophical stances that have the effect of either confirming or challenging the status quo. Further, Grundy argues that to fully capture the complexity of interactive feedback and lag effects, research projects may not be identified wholly with one mode as they usually move through different phases (1982). In the field of nursing, Holter and Schwartz-Barcott (1993) identify three approaches: the technical collaborative approach, the mutual collaborative approach and the enhancement approach (p. 301). In the social services and healthcare area, Hart and Bond (1995) have developed an AR typology. It shares similarities with other typologies and describes four types of AR: experimental, organisational, professionalising and empowering (p. 40). Tripp (2003) locates AR as a category within action inquiry, which is generally understood to be any kind of plan, act, describe and review cycle for inquiry into action in a field of practice. What distinguishes AR from action inquiry more generally is the emphasis on experimental learning and action that is informed by traditional or emergent research techniques. As Tripp (2003) underscores:

> Action Research is an action inquiry sequence that tends towards more radically innovative action based on and monitored by recognised research procedures; action research usually begins with a formal reconnaissance, and there are specific data production and analysis phases, which produce a more general and less wholly actor-centred view of action in field of practice. (n.p.)

Other types and models of AR have also been suggested by McKernan (1991), McCutcheon and Jurg (1990), and Holter and Schwartz-Barcott (1993). A feature of many of these typologies is a differentiation based upon who makes the key decisions regarding problem identification, potential solutions, implementation and evaluation. The degree to which decisions and actions are negotiated in consultation with key stakeholders will often determine the quality of participation and the solution. A typology that makes this, and other, distinctions is that developed by Stephen Kemmis (1993, 2007).

The work of Carr and Kemmis (1986) has become influential, particularly in the field of educational AR (see also Kemmis 1993, 2007). Organised along a political

continuum from top-down to bottom-up control, Carr and Kemmis (1986) make the distinction, as Grundy does above, between technical, practical and 'emancipatory' or 'critical' AR. This categorization of AR into three broad categories is based on the theory of knowledge-constitutive interests developed by Jürgen Habermas (1972, 1974) in his earlier writings. For Habermas, all knowledge generated through research primarily reflects the values and interests of those who operate within certain paradigms. The first paradigm of knowledge production is linked to 'technical interest', the second is 'practical interest' and the third is 'emancipatory interest' (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p. 136). Amongst other problems with Habermas's model, one critique of these knowledge interests is that the artificial boundaries between them are drawn much too 'sharply' (Cohen et al. 2000, p. 31). However, they do provide a starting point for teasing out some of the distinctions between approaches and their underlying assumptions and implications for action research.

Technical action research is focused on maintaining and enhancing effectiveness and efficiency. With an agenda typically formed under the guidance of outside experts or researchers, the focus of this form of action research is on finding 'technical solutions' to 'externally formulated questions' (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p. 202). So, for example, the options of research might be limited to such things as how to develop more efficient methods to manage resources and improve productivity. In this instance, it is difficult, if not impossible, for participants to take a critical stance on the research and to take charge and work towards change themselves. Because it is externally driven, technical action research often provides only a veneer of participation, in effect disempowering participants through collaboration, as the problem, the possible solutions and the criteria for evaluating the solutions are imposed from outside the site.

According to Kemmis (1993), the effort to improve practice and develop professional knowledge through 'practical action research' is best exemplified by the contributions of Donald Schon (1983) in the USA and John Elliott (1978, 1991) in Britain. For example, perhaps something is not going as well as you wish with your teaching and you want to develop and implement new curricula to promote active participation in the classroom, or, in another example, you can see a problem with the management or administration of a health-care facility. Here, action research might adopt a client- or community-focused approach to improving standards of care. It is distinguished from the technical tradition through its problematisation of criteria used to evaluate or judge the research. These are open to development by all the stakeholders through the generation of shared knowledge and action. So, in the above example, when developing methods to improve productivity, the participants at the site might determine that worker fatigue levels are an important criteria when evaluating actions. But action research can be more than an improvement or management tool.

Action research within the third tradition, the emancipatory or critical tradition, foregrounds a concern with 'emancipatory knowledge'. Emancipatory or critical AR is derived from a desire to be free of the constraints on human reason (Carr 1995, p. 115). The research is itself understood to be an important source of *learning* and *change* for a community. Emancipatory action researchers look to not only

improve practice with the constraints of the context, but to change those constraints (Riding et al. 1995). Clearly, there are sharp differences between these strands, and Kemmis and Carr are unabashed advocates of the latter. It is more politically overt, although no more political, than the traditional or orthodox approaches situated in technical and practical forms. With an emphasis on locally relevant place-based research, they argue that emancipatory action research, 'comprehends that social research is always (in one way or another) connected to social action and social movement' (Kemmis 1993, p. 3).

To refine their position, Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) distinguish emancipatory, critical or participatory action research (PAR) from AR more generally. They identify seven key features of PAR. PAR 'is a social process … is participatory … is practical and collaborative … is emancipatory … is critical … is recursive (reflexive, dialectical) [and] … aims to transform both theory and practice' (pp. 597–598). Within this context, activist researchers must be questioning, spontaneous and creative, and be prepared to learn through a cumulative process of trial and error. However, the Columbian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda (1995) also suggests four helpful guidelines for field research and scientific reporting within PAR. These are cited in full for your information below:

- Do not monopolise your knowledge nor impose arrogantly your techniques, but respect and combine your skills with the knowledge of the researched or grassroots communities, taking them as full partners and co-researchers. That is, fill in the distance between subject and object.
- Do not trust elitist versions of history and science which respond to dominant interests, but be receptive to counter-narratives and try to recapture them.
- Do not depend solely on your culture to interpret facts, but recover local values, traits, beliefs and arts for action by and with the research organisations.
- Do not impose your own ponderous scientific style for communicating results, but diffuse and share what you have learned together with the people, in a manner that is wholly understandable and even literary and pleasant, for science should not be necessarily a mystery nor a monopoly of experts and intellectuals (Fals Borda 1995, http://comm-org.wisc.edu/si/falsborda.htm#plenary).

So, there is a lot of valuable know-how as well as useful suggestions and information to be gleaned from recognised experts and activists in the literature. But it ought to be apparent to you by now, that, somewhat ironically perhaps, these recognised experts remind you that PAR relies upon the expert knowledge of *all* participants and is enacted in the potential unpredictability of real-life situations. As such, PAR is a complex, time-consuming and risk-taking process that requires a critical openness to dialogue and learning on the part of all participants or stakeholders. Inspired by a sense of hope and possibility, all this must take place in a context that values humility, patience, courage, spontaneity, creativity and care for others given its roots in emancipatory politics.

In this book, we emphasise the activ*ist* and the activ*ism* in the research; hence, we introduce the term participatory *activist* research, (PA^{t}R): PA^{t}R is an emergent

methodology. Re-emphasising the earlier ontology of Carr and Kemmis, we argue that the activist researcher shifts from being a passive/participant observer to being an active instigator of change. However, in concert with the tenants of activism, you must make an informed decision about and throughout your project of work, hence, this comparative typological analysis and history. It is important to remember too that making a value commitment to a particular strand of research is a political choice and therefore potentially very challenging to others and even yourself. Unlike the action of some forms of research however, your political action is explicit, owned and deliberately aimed at making a positive difference in the lives of those suffering disadvantage or oppression and in the lives of those working in your cultural profession. We now unpack the history of PAR (participatory action research more generally) further below, as its history is, of course, the history of PA^{t}R too.

History

From its earliest stages of development, the story path of AR is complex and labyrinthine, and it is now still emergent. Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist and Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany is often described as the founding 'father' of action research. Yet, Kemmis (1993) and others claim that when Lewin arrived in the United States his work was already significantly informed by ideas developed by Jacob Moreno in Vienna who 'developed a view of action research in which the "action" was about activism, not just about changing practice or behaviour understood in narrowly individualistic terms' (p. 2). Controversy has also flared up about the origins of AR in response to growing awareness of pioneering work historically ignored or downplayed in the United States, particularly those strands with a radical or emancipatory edge in the global south (Kemmis 1993; Montero 2000). For example, Montero (2000) draws our attention to the fact that for the past 50–60 years:

> A well-kept secret is the book published by Thiollent in Brazil, in 1946, by the title of *Metodologia da Pesquisa-Ação* (Methodology of Action-Research), almost unknown outside that country, probably as an effect of being published in what is usually neglected as the periphery. (p. 31)

While this debate about the origins of AR is unsettled, it is clear that different interpretations of participatory or activist AR developed independently in diverse cultural contexts based upon place-based imperatives such as working with poor and oppressed peoples (Fine et al. 2007). With a respectful nod to the past, the Canadian adult educator Budd Hall (2005), who was himself influential in the development of participatory and community research, asserts that Fals Borda inaugurated the term 'participatory action research' in the late 1970s. And PAR practitioners have mobilised participatory or activist AR alongside those who would otherwise be positioned as powerless, nameless and voiceless to engage with a wide variety of problems. Although the roots of PAR are diverse and span many countries particularly in the global south – for example, Columbia, India, Peru, Chile and Tanzania – and several

decades of trial and error grass-roots activism, Kemmis (1993) notes that the radical and political aspirations of this work are not well understood.

Despite this history, since Lewin coined the term 'action research' in 1946, it has emerged as an established research method in teacher education as well as amongst many other members of the cultural professions (Kincheloe 2003). Driven by a concern for the democratisation of knowledge and organisational improvement, the intellectual impulse inspiring Lewin's pioneering work was an optimistic view of AR as a tool for reducing prejudice and improving inter-group dynamics and social relations (Lewin 1998). Using real-life situations and problems 'as the locus of social science research', Lewin's conception of AR was grounded in experiential learning, which was understood to be specific to each situation (McKernan 1991, p. 9). Very much an iterative process, Lewin's well-defined spiral was based on repeated cycles of planning, action and evaluation. Breaking down the traditional hierarchical relationship between the researcher and researched, Lewin argued that in order to 'understand and change certain social practices, social scientists have to include practitioners from the real social work in all phases of inquiry' (McKernan 1991, p. 10). Still, although Lewin's work is clearly foundational in much of the action research literature, this does not diminish the collective contribution of those working in the PAR tradition. In fact, as a result of a desire to break away from the herd, Montero (2000) points out that 'some practitioners were speaking of themselves as "participatory researchers" (Fals Borda 1995), and had stopped referring to Lewin's AR, placing their practice within the field of PAR' (p. 131).

Action Research in Education and Beyond

AR has gained influence and popularity in educational research as well as some traction among practitioners in applied settings such as nursing, health and social work. Indeed, its perceived usefulness is evident in the number of competing handbooks and readers that have appeared on the market, filled with either practical examples of 'how to do it' in different contexts or attempting to push theoretical and methodological boundaries (Cammarota and Fine 2008; McNiff 2010; Noffke and Somekh 2009; Reason and Bradbury 2008; Stringer 1996; Winter and Munn-Giddings 2001). The increased visibility of AR is largely due to the fact that it is seen as an opportunity to bridge a perceived gap between theory and practice. Further, it has offered all types of practitioners with a refreshingly optimistic language of possibility that talks about research as 'learning by doing' (O'Brien 2001; see also Wadsworth 1998). Setting aside the blinkers of orthodoxy, AR inspires 'epistemological curiosity' (Freire 1998, p. 83) and the very pedagogical and political conditions for imaginatively rehearsing and enacting what Fine refers to as 'a world that is not yet imagined' (1994, p. 30). Thus, its appeal extends to both public and private sectors far beyond the realm of academia. Unfortunately, its history in these many and varied contexts is spotted.

Original or not, Lewin's work was the point of reference for Stephen Corey at Columbia University's Teachers College, who introduced the idea of action research as an alternative paradigm for action-based inquiry to the educational community in 1949 (Kincheloe 1995). From professional development to curriculum reform and school structuring, Corey defined action research as the process through which teachers, working together in groups, solved problems specific to their own schools and classrooms. It is by no means insignificant that Corey was a little ambivalent towards Lewin's principled commitment to democratic ideals in the workplace. Swaying slightly from Lewin's formula, Corey was primarily interested in AR for pragmatic purposes related to issues of professional development and educational improvement (Noffke 1997). Although ahead of his time, it must be pointed out that Corey was influenced by the logic of positivism, and in his efforts to secure the acceptance of AR as a competing yet legitimate research form, he used it to resolve social problems 'scientifically'. Thus freighted, the relationship between theory and practice was understood to be largely technical, with a goal orientation towards developing more efficient and effective solutions to everyday problems. To his credit, Corey did launch the 'teacher-as-researcher movement' that flourished in schools during this period. Despite his best intentions, however, AR was increasingly carried out by outside researchers with the cooperation of schools and teachers. More problematically, this positivist and technical framework made it difficult to imagine that AR could be used for political purposes, especially in the conservative climate of the 1950s (Noffke 1997).

Despite a promising start, AR quickly fell on hard times in the United States during the 1960s. Few would disagree, we think, that the theory used to inform or guide the research process has a profound effect on its outcomes. A distinct and deliberate political shift came with the formation of a linkage between the language of critical theory and radical political activism in the 1960s (Stringer 1996, p. 9). This radical strand of AR did not hide its political project. It had its roots in the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, feminism, Third World socialism, Latin American research traditions based on indigenous knowledge, movements for popular education as expressed for example at the Highlander Centre and Freire's well-elaborated notions of education for 'critical consciousness' (conscientisation) and 'cultural action for freedom' (Carr and Kemmis 1986; Freire 1972). And although the tradition of PAR predates the contributions made by Freire, having been widely employed throughout the world throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Strong-Wilson (cited in Riecken et al. 2005) argues, 'strong links exist between the two traditions, the most important of which is the use of research and literacy to raise awareness and generate action' (http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/viewArticle/533/1154). In fleshing out a 'bottom-up' process of engagement and empowerment that gave salience to the often silenced struggles of oppressed groups, this form of AR gained a significant foothold as a grass-roots movement both within the realm of community-based participatory approaches to research and action (CBPR) and as a form of political mobilisation and research oriented to the recuperation and enrichment of educative encounters, organisational change and social transformation (Carr and Kemmis 1986). Addressing the

reality of power and authority, this form of AR's commitment to problem-posing dialogue, distributed decision making and place-based activism distinguished it from styles of management and administration common in many highly centralised, autocratic and unresponsive institutions such as schools.

Unfortunately, the critical focus on questions regarding power and authority largely fell off the agenda of AR after it was embraced by educators influenced by Lawrence Stenhouse's view of 'teacher as researcher'. No wide-eyed radical, Stenhouse revived the teacher-as-researcher movement in the 1970s. He achieved this by hailing the practising classroom teacher as the most effective person in the research process to identify and prioritise problems, and to develop and evaluate solutions, whether it be to improve their own reflective teaching practices in the classroom, for teacher preparation in pre-service and graduate education programmes as a school-based curriculum development, or in the formulation of education policy (Johnson 1993). During this catalysing period, AR in education evolved as a specialist area of research under the direction of John Elliott and Clem Adelman in the UK, as exemplified by the work of the Ford Teaching Project between 1973 and 1976 (Holly 1991). However, unlike its previous incarnation in the United States, the teacher-as-researcher movement that gained new life in the UK as well as throughout the Western world resisted Stenhouse's previous pragmatic addiction to 'science' and 'technical control', and sometimes even had a political edge. Placing teachers at the centre of theorising about their own practice, the teacher-as-researcher movement expanded exponentially in the school system as it boosted professional identity, autonomy and status.

However, there was a downside to the increased acceptance and visibility of AR, for example, through its connection to labour and social reproduction. Contrary to loose claims of political status and efficacy, Winch and Foreman-Peck (2000) observed that most teacher-led AR 'is much more prosaic and practical, and always was' (p. 172). Much AR is informed by the consensus-orientated assumptions and values of liberalism and functionalism, with practitioners such as health-care staff, educators and community workers often torn between believing in the goals of their workplace and frustrated with carrying them out. Viewed in such administrative and ideological contexts, AR can become just another normalising practice if its quiet acquiesce with the status quo is not challenged (Martin 2000). Far removed from Lewin's group method of creating change, let alone the more radical goals and principles of PAR, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Kemmis (1991) argued that a lot of AR had, in practice, become too individualised and tied to the pragmatic realities of particular classrooms and schools, whether undertaken by teachers for their own intrinsic purposes or externally motivated, for example, in the institutional rewards in the form of wage income or in accredited expertise. As recently as 2005, an edition of the journal *Educational Action Research* (Vol. 13) revisited Carr and Kemmis' Becoming Critical (1986) with the contributors restating the importance of the critical and transformational edge of AR; 'action research has been popularised and appropriated as an implementation tool instead of as a social change method' (Groundwater-Smith 2005, p. 335). And again, Kemmis (2010) and Kinsler (2010), and others, remind us of the emancipatory possibilities of AR, with Kinsler (2010)

exploring the constraining and enabling circumstances that AR researchers face when aiming to be truly emancipatory.

To renew the focus on the explicit intention of transformation, in its next phase of development, AR became more subversive. Despite appearances, the radical formulations of AR such as those grounded in the work of Freire did not collapse in the 1960s but rather became actively pursued by a widening community of action researchers and action research facilitators around the world (Kemmis 1991, p. 70). As noted earlier, Fals Borda was part of a generation of critical scholars who refined and developed PAR, where it took root in the diverse place-based struggles of anti-colonialism and liberation in the global south. Unfortunately, there has been a tendency for researchers to look abroad to the old home citadels of empire or colonialism such as Britain and the United States for guidance and ideas (Bessant and Holbrook 1995). Working in creative ways against the grain of such conventions, during the 1980s and 1990s, some researchers in Canada, Australia and South Africa began to raise political and ethical questions about traditional approaches and decided not to import the 'conventional wisdom' or uncritically adopt a theory or method. These developments led to new fertile ground for an ideologically charged place-based activism in a broad range of cultural and professional contexts. Taking the idea of emancipatory research seriously, this period of experimentation and innovation saw a blurring of academic-activist epistemologies (assumptions about knowledge, see Chap. 4) and ontologies (assumptions about the nature of existence, see Chap. 4) grounded in diverse forms of community engagement including with First Nation peoples.

Clashing over the most basic issues of theory and practice, Australian academic Stephen Kemmis had a particular bone to pick with the latent pragmatism of the UK strand of AR. To this end, in the 1980s, he led an academic group at Deakin University (which became a haven for academics interested in critical theory and AR) out of this pragmatic thicket (Kemmis 1991). The quest to move beyond professional pragmatism and institutional patronage ignited a debate between the two schools of thought in the UK and Australia, and signalled the beginning of substantial radical scholarship, rooted in critical theory. There is a powerful popularism that resists critical theory, and indeed, there has been a certain amount of hostility between these two camps (Carr and Kemmis 2005; Elliott 2005). Embracing the notion that the contradictions of social life will find resolution only through collective struggle and change, the response of the Australian group was to argue that some of the older models of AR developed in the global north were constrained by a close and uncritical alignment with the institutional status quo. According to the Australian group, 'as action research becomes more methodologically sophisticated and technically proficient, it will lose its critical edge' (Anderson et al. as cited in Diniz-Pereira 2002, p. 388). Mapping these territorial struggles, Kemmis and Grundy (1997) distinguished the unique features of Australian AR from its counterparts in Britain, continental Europe and the United States:

> It is important to note that Australian educational AR emerged as distinct from its counterparts in Britain, continental Europe and the United States of America. British AR in the 1970s shared with Australian AR the participatory and collaborative style of work, but was less

> strategically-oriented and probably less politically aware. It emphasized interpretative inquiry where Australian AR was more critical. Continental European AR shared a similar critical perspective with Australian AR, but did not appear to have developed the same practical thrust of the Australian work, and American AR developed within education as more teacher-oriented and teacher-controlled. (Diniz-Pereira 2002, p. 388)

Against the dominance of 'teacher-as-researcher' forms of AR within education, critical frames (Lather 1992) have also looked to include participants other than teachers, calling for research as radical pedagogy in order to locate the voices of students or young people (e.g. Akom et al. 2008; Cammarota and Fine 2008; Morrell 2007; Steinberg and Kincheloe 1998) or more broadly, those of the oppressed (Fals Borda 1995; Freire 1972). While notions of 'voice' or representation are problematic (Holdsworth 2005), it is the intention of PA^{t}R to explicitly deal with this to ensure agency, as participants act in the framing and intervention practices of the issue. Supporting this view, Udas (1998) argues that to build power from below, PAR is distinguished from AR by a much 'higher standard of participation' (p. 601).

With its open, dialogic and interactive approach that emphasises reciprocity, trust and collective action, PA^{t}R breaks down the traditional barrier between the researcher and the researched. Through its direct contact and engagement with all participants in knowledge production, PA^{t}R seeks to build collaboration and enduring relationships with potential participants. These relationships respond to place-based problems through processes of collective learning and community capacity building. Given that the problems identified by local actors and community agencies can be overwhelming, the processes and practices fostered by PA^{t}R also offer the possibility of building new relationships, coalitions and organisations capable of confronting the challenges of scale and complexity.

In summary, AR is an umbrella term for many different but related forms, and it has a history of development, consolidation, fragmentation and reconstitution. In particular, the frame we articulate here, PA^{t}R, is one of those rhizomatically emerging methodologies that seeks to keep true to notions of participation, collaboration, reflexivity, activism, social justice and the transformation of theory and practice found in many of its relatives such as PAR. Within this lively context, the point we would like to make is that action research is a messy, iterative and generative approach that is constantly being made and remade within diverse place-based contexts. Kemmis (1993, pp. 2–3) states, '… it is possible to see waves of different groups in different places reviving, revitalising and refurbishing "the" idea of AR to meet different and changing needs and circumstances'. What matters for us here is that there are many close parallels in the development of its ideas and application in different disciplines and fields of practice. For example, in areas such as nursing, Hart and Bond (1995) argue that the development of AR parallels education even if it 'has lagged behind' (p. 32). Despite establishing an increasingly visible and credible reputation, however, criticisms of AR abound. Although by no means an exhaustive list, some of the more predictable ones include that it is an excuse for 'sloppy' research, that it does not produce generalisable knowledge, that it is too difficult to do and that there is often a lack of clarity about the theoretical

commitments of researchers. Picking up on this last point, in the next chapter, we define more specifically what theories inform methodologies in AR generally and in PA^{t}R in particular.

Guiding/Clarifying Questions

1. What are common features of AR?
2. What motivated Lewin to develop AR?
3. What are some of the characteristics of Lewin's model of AR?
4. How did various educators adopt or adapt Lewin's ideas?
5. What distinguished the UK and Australian camps of AR in the late twentieth century?
6. What professional autonomy do practitioners such as educators, health-care staff and community workers have to engage in AR?
7. What are some of the characteristics of PAR that distinguish it from other approaches to AR?
8. What distinction are we making here by using the term PA^{t}R?

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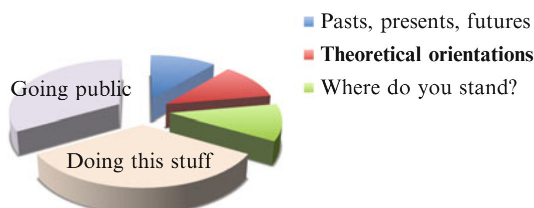
Chapter 3
Theoretical Orientations: Critical Theory and Related Theories for Activism

Section A: The bigger picture



The previous chapter gave a brief historical overview of the action research (AR) family and its salient features, forces and moments. AR is sometimes critiqued for its weak theoretical foundations, as practitioners may *appear* to be simply doing what seems to work, rather than being guided by principled theory. We address this in relation to a particular theory of action that underwrites PA^{t}R. This is our point of departure from some other approaches, as we do not pretend research is objective or neutral. This chapter will briefly describe some of the history, philosophy and nature of the theory, critical theory (CT), that has influenced many action research methodologies generally (although at times obfuscated) and that we are foregrounding as the essential feature of PA^{t}R. Just as all spokes in a wheel emanate from the central hub, so too all actions in PA^{t}R emanate from critical theory.

Much of the work in the CT tradition is preoccupied with uncovering the ways in which social reality is variously negotiated and resisted 'from below' or at the 'grass-roots level', within established networks of power and authority. AR helps to build a bridge, to fill the gap, between CT and practice. CT is the ideological glue that binds AR to practice. CT has many ideological descendents, but a common abiding concern of CT is building upon the productive power of local knowledges, values and beliefs as the basis for social transformation. CT values multiple ways of knowing and is open to different forms and types of learning and research

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to drive social change. In this way, CT is not an autonomous and abstract enterprise of the 'Ivory Tower' but rather an embodied site of re-imaging in all sorts of different social arenas. In sharing the vitality, strength and life of people engaged in emancipatory actions, including, for example, prison reform movements, workplace reform movements and school reform movements, one criterion for CT is the degree to which analysis uncovers the practical 'unactualised potential' for transcendence, social change and human liberation inherent in any social institution (Kirkpatrick et al. 1978). With this agenda in mind, the existing social order is critiqued using theories rooted in CT and acted upon through methodologies such as PA^{t}R. Making a space for resistance, the philosophical ambition of activist scholars goes beyond social theory as a way of 'knowing about' and therefore emphasises *action*. Activist scholars look to action. And critical social theorists look to praxis – the enlivening of theory through action, as their gauge of the soundness of theory. Through practice, theory is applied, tested and at the same time created, confirmed or recreated.

Giving broad meaning to the term, CT has an interdisciplinary tendency that incorporates theories including gender theory, critical race theory, critical pedagogy and queer theory. As some of these varied theoretical positions may act as a more specific activist foundation for your work, still with your intention of working within a CT and PA^{t}R framework, a selection of these theories will be outlined below. You should begin to see the relationships and commonalities between them in terms of their relationships to CT while also recognising their specificities. Once you have read Chaps. 4 and 5, you should also begin to see how these theoretical positions (Chap. 3) relate to philosophical positions (Chap. 4) and methodology (Chap. 5).

Critical Theory/ies

Critical theory is something of an umbrella term under which different forms of activist engagement are classified. It is a complex and dynamic area that is concerned with possibilities for social transformation. There are two meanings of the term 'critical theory', each derived from a different intellectual tradition, and they are epistemologically separate. Critical theory in literary studies (also referred to as hermeneutics) is a form of knowledge via interpretation in order to understand the meanings of symbolic expressions and human texts. The second meaning of critical theory, sometimes differentiated as critical *social* theory, is a theoretical orientation that forms the historical base for action research, participatory action research and, now, participatory activist research (PA^{t}R). Critical social theory involves understanding and theoretical explanation through self-reflective knowledge; critical social theory aims to expose, oppose and reduce people's entrapment in systems of domination or dependence. In this sense, critical social theory orientates to critiquing and changing society rather than just observing, understanding or explaining it.

This is the understanding of critical theory that we refer to here when we use the acronym CT.

Early roots of CT were established with Kant's transcendental idealism (*Critique of Pure Reason*, 1934), Hegel's concept of the moving subject (*Phänomenologie des Geistes* 1977) and Marx's critique of capitalism (*Capital* 1967). Kant worked with a notion of critique of reason to disestablish some of the false, unprovable or dogmatic beliefs generated under the auspices of theology, metaphysics, superstition and irrational authority. He highlighted the importance of critiquing knowledge, often hidden behind the 'truth',[1] to ascertain its limits. Hegel combined a philosophy of action with a philosophy of reflection, positing that through self-reflection, a person comes to know themselves at a higher level of consciousness. Working with Hegel's ideas, Marx developed conceptual tools to critique ideology, in his instance with reference to capitalism. The scope of CT[2] was further developed and expanded by what came to be known as the Frankfurt School, established in the 1930s and located in the Institute of Social Research in the University of Frankfurt. The work of those in the school was in contrast to theory in the scientistic or positivist observational mode, the dominant and *naturalised* theory of the time. By naturalised we mean that it came to be taken for granted as a truth. The Frankfurt School firmly established that epistemologically, the purpose of CT was to enable humans to be self-reflexive and emancipate themselves from forms of domination. This is evident in the work of critical scholars, including Max Horkheimer, Jürgen Habermas, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Hebert Marcuse, Pierre Bourdieu, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Paulo Freire, Derrick Bell, Matsuda Lawrence and more recently Robert Delgado, bell hooks, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Michael Apple, Luce Irigaray, Henry Giroux, Judith Butler, Peter McLaren, Patti Lather, Juan-Miguel Fernandez Balboa, Eve Sedgewick and Gloria Anzaldúa. CT is available in related approaches such as feminist theories, postcolonial and indigenous theories, critical race theories, queer theories, neo-Marxian theories, social ecology, cultural studies and performance studies. Paradigm wars between the reconstructive (critical modernists) and deconstructive (postmodernist) camps have ensued, and disciplinary divisions such as critical educational theory and critical pedagogy have created a diversity of critical theo*ries* on which to base your work. Writers such as Thomas Popkewitz and Lynn Fendler (1999) encourage critique of and within critical theory itself but return to the general intentions of Horkheimer's (1972) legacy that 'what is needed is a radical reconsideration … of the knowing individual as such' (p. 199).

[1]Truth: There are many claims and perspectives on what constitutes truth and how it is defined. The use of truth here intends to highlight the taken-for-granted truths that Kant was attempting to critique.

[2]Critical theory concepts include the following: biopower, communicative action, critical race theory, cultural studies, deconstruction, dehumanisation, disciplinary institutions, discourse, enlightenment, episteme, feminism, genealogy, governmentality, heterotopia, ideology, objectification, orientalism, panopticon, parrhesia, phenomenology, power, power-knowledge, postcolonialism, postmodernism, post-structuralism, queer theory, reason, semiotics, social constructionism, state racism, structuralism, cultural industry, hermeneutics, public sphere, world-systems theory.

As we noted above, *activist* scholars go beyond any routine understanding of what counts as 'truth'. Burbules and Berk (1999) note, for example, that 'For critical thinking, it is not enough to know how to seek reasons, truth, and understanding; one must also be impassioned to pursue them rigorously' (p. 51). *Action*, or more accurately from our perspective, *activism*, then, is the pursuit of reasons, truth and understanding. Socially critical activists such as Freire (1972) emphasise that the greatest barrier to liberation is a fatalistic and ingrained belief in the inevitability and necessity of an unjust status quo and a subsequent lack of willingness to act. Hence, CT stresses *critical* consciousness, that is, a change in consciousness that is linked to concrete action. As noted above, *praxis* therefore is that moment where the present practice, informed or affected from the past, re-inscribes/reproduces/reforms/recreates the possible future: Praxis is the social in the making. It is through action that particular possibilities come into practice or not. In other words, analysing, deconstructing and even reconstructing possibilities for change need to be *actualised* through practice. Where that action occurs is still a space of debate and beyond the framework for this chapter. However, it is worth pondering the genesis of action: Is even thinking about an act the beginning of that act as the thinking of it shifts us into a 'language of possibility' as distinct from a 'language of critique' (Giroux 1983).

It is on the basis of praxis that a few of the related approaches below are described, approaches that might help orientate your use of PA^{t}R depending on your theoretical orientation and the issue/s your research intends to address. This chapter is not intended as a comprehensive review – rather, here, we orient you to some of CT approaches in order that you can then extend your reading in the approach most suited to your own concerns. PA^{t}R's domain is inquiry into the normative dimension of social activity, in particular how actors employ their practical knowledge and normative attitudes from complex perspectives in various sorts of contexts. It also must consider social facts as problematic situations from the point of view of variously situated agents. Hence, PA^{t}R by its very nature is critical. Many in the AR family aim to be critical. However, PA^{t}R mitigates the danger of losing its critical edge by wearing its critical foundations on its sleeve: deliberately and explicitly.

Gender Studies

Feminist theory provides a critique of social relations. It analyses inequality and its nature, specifically gender inequality, with an orientation to gender politics, power relations and sexuality. Critique and analysis also sit alongside the promotion of women's rights, interests and issues. Those who work with feminist theory, for example, Judith Butler (1993, 1997, 1999, 2003, 2004) and Patti Lather (1986a, b, 1991a, b, 1992, 1994, 1995), explore issues such as discrimination, objectification, oppression, stereotyping and patriarchy. The links between the different approaches are illustrated by some of the more well-known writers such as Judith Butler and Raewyn Connell. As a gender theorist, Butler draws on the traditions of CT,

queer theory, third-wave feminism and postmodernism. She is credited with conceptualising important ideas such as the social construction and differentiation of sex/gender. Her theories of performativity and who can 'be' (Butler 1997, 2003) are influenced by others from the CT tradition such as Foucault, Irigaray, Adorno, Lacan and, even further distant historically, Hegel. Butler's ideas have in turn influenced other critical feminist theorists such as Eve Sedgwick and Lauren Berlant. Butler's *activism* has been to agitate in the public sphere around issues such as the violence done by Israel and the violence done by the USA, in particular the treatment of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay. That violence includes the ways that social mechanisms can work to render certain groups of people unrecognisable, that is, their existence is not recognised. In this way, people become invisible, symbolically erased. One example Butler uses is the omission or exclusion in the media of Arabic peoples injured or killed in the context of 'the war on terror'. Butler stresses that issues such as these violences should be thoughtfully debated rather than defined by certain kinds of exclusion and censorship.

Another example of someone attempting to 'know through action' rather than just 'know about' is Patti Lather (1986a, b, 1991a, b, 1992, 1994, 1995). With a strong background in CT, Patti Lather has interests in (post)critical methodology, feminist ethnography and post-structuralism. Lather's work integrates feminism and postmodernism into critical education theory to tackle significant questions facing educators and researchers. For Lather, critique or reflexivity of one's own perspective/theory is often an explicit part of a researcher's story. As a case in point, in her work relating to women living with HIV/AIDS, she reveals the (hitherto hidden) stories of the women with whom she worked (Lather and Smithies 1997). However, Lather deliberately and openly articulates her struggle with the tensions of empowerment. She questioned whether her work with the women actually enabled them to act on their own behalf and for better outcomes. Was empowerment a real outcome of her work for the participants or simply some academic 'feel-good' ideal? This will most probably be something with which you too have to grapple: Are you really making a positive and lasting difference to the people in your study?

The sorts of PA^{t}R projects that may be informed by gender studies could include the following: What changes might enhance learning for students sorted by sex-segregated classrooms? How can the oppressive sex stereotypes that shape body enhancement operations be interrupted? What practices can ensure positive nursing recruitment without being distracted by gender? How might we mitigate the negative outcomes of differentiated participation in school sports and physical activity and enhance outcomes for all genders? How is literacy affected by constructions of gender and race, and how might negative affects be prevented? How can the treatment of HIV/AIDS patients be non-discriminatory? What sex practice education enables healthy relationships in young people? What are the implications for taxing tampons but not Viagra in privileged versus non-privileged communities? What are the social implications of fertility programmes in 'poverty norm' countries? How can domestic violence be reduced by exposing gendered assumptions in the public sphere? How might gang rape become an impossible act in white, middle-class communities?

Race Theory

Just as feminist and gender scholars emphasise the socially constructed nature of sex/gender, a second approach that draws heavily from CT, critical race theory (CRT), emphasises the socially constructed nature of race and discrimination. CRT shares an overlapping literature with both critical legal studies and elements of CT, drawing also from radical feminism, cultural nationalism and neo-Marxism. It is linked to the development of African American thought in the post-civil rights era. The writings and practices of people such as Derrick Bell, Matsuda Lawrence and Robert Delgado challenged the 'colour-blind' approach of the civil rights movement to social justice, particularly in relation to the stalling of civil rights since the advances in the USA through to the 1960s. Activists and scholars, such as Matsuda Lawrence, have been interested in studying and transforming the relationships between race, racism and power using CRT to, for example, expose the injustices perpetuated in hate crime/speech legislation. Today, scholars such as Gloria Ladson-Billings, Gloria Anzaldúa, Linda, Tuhiwai Smith and Graham Smith, Hingangaroa Smith, Leonie Pihama and Sandy Grande link CRT, Kaupapa Maori and Red Pedagogy with education, while other offshoots of CRT include critical white studies, Latina/o critical race studies, Asian American critical race studies, indigenous critical theory and American Indian critical race studies or TribalCrit. As the title suggests, Denzin et al.'s (2008) *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies* is an example of such concerted efforts to disrupt and transform traditional ways of knowing in a reflexive and generative way. Likewise, Martin Nakata (2007), a Torres Strait Islander academic and activist, has argued for an indigenous standpoint theory that acknowledges what he refers to as the 'cultural interface'. Unfortunately, as there is little room in academia for other ways of knowing, Gloria Anzaldúa (1990) applies CRT in asking 'people of colour' to participate in the act of transforming the process of theorising. She says

> Theory, then, is a set of knowledges. Some of these knowledges have been kept from us - entry into some professions and academia denied us. Because we are not allowed to enter discourse, because we are often disqualified and excluded from it, because what passes for theory these days is forbidden territory for us, it is vital that we occupy theorizing space, that we not allow white men and women solely to occupy it. By bringing in our own approaches and methodologies, we transform that theorizing space. (p. xxv)

CT asks questions around the study of sources of knowledge (i.e. epistemology), while CRT, such as Anzaldúa's work, applies these questions to the context of race, asking the epistemological question: Whose knowledge counts and whose knowledge is discounted?

CRT may inform the work of those in the cultural professions particularly where issues of race or ethnicity could have impact. PA^{t}R projects founded in CRT might investigate issues such as indigenous health knowledges, health care for immigrants, access to community resources in ethnic communities, social policy and social cohesion, immigrant medics in rural areas, the health gap between white and black, indigenous education, streaming or tracking students into ability groups, public responses to immigration policies and practices, teaching children whose first language is not that of the education system and the relationships between poverty, race and health.

Critical Pedagogy

Another approach related to CT is critical pedagogy. Researchers such as Paulo Freire, Antonia Darder, Shirley Steinberg, Sande Grande, Joe Kincheloe, Peter McLaren, Henry Giroux, Michael Apple, Zeus Leonardo, Jeffery Duncan-Andrade and Ernest Morrell have worked to promote critical social theory within education to encourage social change within the education system and beyond. A very strong illustration of a scholar who lived their critical theory was Freire. As an educator, Freire laboured to help the dispossessed peoples of rural and urban Brazil to break free of their silencing. His work was considered such a threat to the social order that he was imprisoned and then exiled. After his exile, he worked with the poor in Chile and wrote the book for which he is probably best known *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire 1993). In this work, he articulated how, rather than being complicit in one's own oppression, humans could become conscious of their own perception of their reality, then deal critically with this reality to transform their own world beyond a 'false consciousness'.

Freire was eventually invited back to Brazil where he later became the Minister of Education for Sao Paulo and established educational reform throughout much of Brazil. He, like those critical pedagogues who followed him, was a strong advocate for education to go beyond the 'banking' model, where a teacher might deposit knowledge in much the same way as a person might deposit money in a bank account. In Freire's (1993) view, the banking model suggests that neither students nor teachers are involved in critique; they are both essentially disempowered by a lack of creativity and by a lack of recognition of the politics of education. Hence, they accept their world as it is rather than recognising the mechanisms of their own oppression and seeking to reduce their own oppression. Critical pedagogy recognises that education is neither a neutral activity nor apolitical and strives to create conditions for what Freire (1993) refers to as a *problem-posing* education. A problem-posing education seeks transformation in knowledge and situation rather than reproduction of knowledge and situation. For Freire (1993), this is achieved in and through dialogue that creates the pedagogical and political conditions for students to 'name the world' in order to change it (p. 76). This is not a simple matter. Dialogue, as Giroux and McLaren (1995) argue, is not just listening to or 'affirming and celebrating the interplay of different voices and experiences' (p. 40). Rather, it places considerable importance on questioning any adherence to the dominant ideology that is often presented as 'common sense' (Freire 1998, pp. 60–64). Here, common sense has to do with taken-for-granted ways of knowing that are perceived as 'traditional', 'natural', 'normal' or simply a matter of 'intuition'. Yet, common sense is not pure, static or context-independent. In Gramsci's words, 'Common sense is not something rigid and immobile, but is continually transforming itself, enriching itself with scientific ideas and with philosophical opinions which have entered ordinary life' (Gramsci 1971, p. 326).

Overlaid with the negative baggage of ideology that distorts our understanding of the world, common sense often operates in all its transmuting complexity as a frame

to justify or allow the perpetuation of injustice. The focus here then is breaking with this ideology and the attendant power relations that have fostered a culture of silence around undiscussed, undiscussable and potentially unmentionable issues through processes of naming and renaming (Freire 1993). To provide just one example, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) discusses how such practices of 'naming and renaming' have been applied to break the colonial silencing of the Maori people and their struggle for rights with the use of 'original indigenous names' to 'literally rename the landscape' (p. 157). Likewise, Aboriginal activists in Australia renamed the official anniversary of the arrival of the first fleet from Australia Day to Invasion Day, but the project of 'naming and renaming' could just as easily be applied to routine work practices or everyday objects (Newman 2006). Some of the original tenets of critical pedagogy are reflected in a quote by Freire: 'The future isn't something hidden in a corner. The future is something we build in the present'. (cited from http://www.perfectfit.org/CT/freire1.html. Accessed 5 April 2010).

PA'R projects founded in critical pedagogy might take up issues associated with poverty and schooling, power and knowledge in the hospital ward, the legitimation of knowledge in professional placements/internships in social work, welfare and education, young people and popular culture, public health education, community education and social change through education.

Queer Theory

The final sample from the related approaches that we use here to illustrate some of the links between the critical theory tradition and other theories is queer theory (QT). Very new to the CT family, the term QT was reportedly coined by the theorist Teresa de Lauretis (1986, 1991) in the early 1990s. The appropriation of the term queer as a strategic term problematises notions of gender, sexual orientation and/or sexuality. While the main project of QT has been to explore the contestations of the social categorisation of gender and sexuality more specifically, it has also been to do the same to normative identities more broadly. 'Queer' is treated not as an identity but as a critique of identity. With a history drawing both on feminist theory and gay and lesbian studies, QT challenges the notion of 'straight' ideology as well as other classifications, such as lesbian, created by such an ideology. Judith Butler, who you have already met above, is considered a queer theorist as is Michel Foucault, Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick and David Halperin.

As a form of activist research, QT is a relatively new and emerging area of practice, so there are very few examples from which to draw. However, the Pridehouse Project of street involvement and homelessness amongst queer/questioning youth acts as one good example (see Suzanne De Castell and Jennifer Jenson 2002). The powerful work of Therese Quinn and Erica Meiners (2009) who discussed, protested and resisted changes in education acts is another example of activism informed by QT. A final example is that of the 'Gay Oral History Project' (Epprecht 1999) in Zimbabwe where professional historians and community activists came together to

create an alternative model and history for Southern Africa. For cultural professionals, PA^{t}R projects founded on QT might investigate and act upon issues around gender assignment in intersex infants, homophobia in community groups, heterosexism in the professions, bullying based upon sexuality, female genital mutilation, sex education as community education, same-sex relationship visibility, female-to-male gender reassignment and transexuality in school children.

Only a few of the approaches that link with CT are represented above, so it is important to realise and extend one's understanding of the wealth of approaches that might inform your work. For instance, postcolonial theory became part of the critical family in the 1970s and will be useful to your work if you are focusing on literature and practices produced in countries that were once, or still are, colonies, or indeed, countries that were once colonisers. Here, as Hulme (1995) reminds us, 'a country can be postcolonial and colonizing at the same time' (p. 122). Importantly, you should now be able to visualise some of the relationships between these approaches in the 'critical family' and with the theoretical and methodological approaches that are perhaps closer to your own PA^{t}R project. Before entering into more detail around methodology though, we now shift to a chapter that aims to extend your understandings of the ontological, epistemological and ethical orientations that underpin these approaches or traditions, this will inform the decisions you make around your project and praxis.

Guiding/Clarifying Questions

1. What are the characteristics of CT?
2. What orientations do gender studies, race theory, critical pedagogy and queer theory have in common?
3. Who are some of the key theorists in gender studies, race theory, critical pedagogy, queer theory and postcolonial theory?
4. What might be regarded as the essence of each of these theoretical orientations?
5. Which of these theories might you apply to your work context?
6. Consider a 'problem' or 'issue' in your workplace; consider it through the lens of different critical theories.

Extending Your Reading

You can easily find publications by the scholars listed in this chapter. We recommend you extend your understanding first though, by reading the detailed and comprehensive description of the philosophy, history and nature of critical theory in

Rasmussen, D. (Ed.). (1996). *Handbook of critical theory*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

For an early theoretical application of critical theory that underpinned an action research approach see

Carr, W., & Kemmis, S. (1986). *Becoming critical: Education, knowledge and action research*. Geelong: Deakin University.

For more on *critical race theory,* see

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (Eds.). (2000). *Critical race theory: The cutting edge*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

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Connell, R. (1995). *Masculinities*. St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin.

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And for a taste of the complexities that take on several theoretical aspects
Bloodsworth-Lugo, M. (2007). *In-between bodies: Sexual difference, race, and sexuality*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

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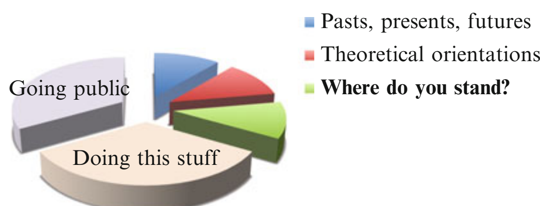
Chapter 4
Where Do You Stand: Philosophical Orientations

Section A: The bigger picture



The process of researching is an educational process: We attempt to learn something new. And in the case of PA^{t}R, those involved in the research create better conditions for themselves and in a flow on effect, perhaps for others. We can learn more through applying theory and constructing new theory, taking new perspectives, creating new insights and applying new practices just as we benefit from breakthroughs in technology or how we understand the mind. Throughout this chapter, we take an oppositional view of theory in that we understand theory to be critical (not simply affirmative or reproductive) and capable of producing new knowledges. Theory provides people with the individual and therefore political space to understand their situatedness within emerging social relations. We understand that the personal is political. For there to be change in societal practices, there needs to be changes in individual practices and therefore in practices between individuals. As you saw in Chap. 3, at root, critical theory (CT) is not neutral. It identifies itself with the interests and struggles of the people that we are involved with as workers in cultural professions. One's beliefs, attitudes and assumptions come from one's philosophical orientations, and we investigate these here as a means of supporting why certain questions might be asked and answered through PA^{t}R and why other questions might sit outside PA^{t}R.

lisahunter et al., *Participatory Activist Research in the Globalised World: Social Change Through the Cultural Professions*, Explorations of Educational Purpose 26,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4426-4_4, © Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2013

Where Do You Stand?

In this book, we examine your 'orientations' in a variety of ways. In this chapter, we interrogate philosophical orientations in relation to:

- The nature of reality (ontology)
- The nature of knowledge (epistemology)
- The nature of values relating to human conduct (ethics)

In Chap. 3, we examined the theoretical orientations that inform the questions being asked and, in Chap. 5, the methodological orientations that determine the design of your research. Each of these relates to the other (Fig. 4.1). While Chaps. 5, 6 and 7 focus more specifically on the design of your research, its methodological orientations and methods of field text construction and research text construction through analysis, this chapter focuses on the philosophical orientations that ultimately influence what questions might be asked, which methods are used and the nuances of those methods. For example, a commonly used method of data construction is researcher observation. If you are working with a critical theoretical framework, you are directed in particular ways of understanding that are interested to examine what is real and whose knowledge counts. Hence, what you will 'see' when you are doing observations may be quite different to what a positivist might 'see'. Our ontological, epistemological, ethical and theoretical orientations sensitise us to ask particular questions and not others and to observe particular things and not others. For instance, with a critical perspective, you understand that despite the espoused values of education for all, many schooling practices reproduce a status quo that disadvantages many students who are not part of dominant society. You also witness some of the stifling adult control over *whose knowledge is valued* in the classroom; you notice that there is a narrow top-down curricula and state-based normative examinations that dictate students' learning experiences rather than an organic curricula that is negotiated by those (teachers, students, community) involved in living it. In the health professions, you experience the valuing of a medical doctor's knowledge over that of a nurse or social worker, or recognise that some people needing your services are not recognised via exclusionary definitions. As a manager newly promoted to the role from the ranks of your manual worker colleagues, you recognise that many grass-roots 'good ideas' go unheard and are rendered impossible by micromanagement strategies despite the rhetoric of consultation and collaboration embedded in company policies and procedures.

Already you will be asking a different set of questions in your research to someone who believes that who gets to count, and how, or what the issue might be are unquestionable and fixed. For example, if you were working through critical theory in education, you would have different questions to someone who believes that reproduction of the status quo is a foundational value of education and that students are in schools to learn the knowledge that the adults before them have created. In the first instance, your method of observations might be around how power works in the classpace and education more broadly. Your focus might be on a negotiated plan of

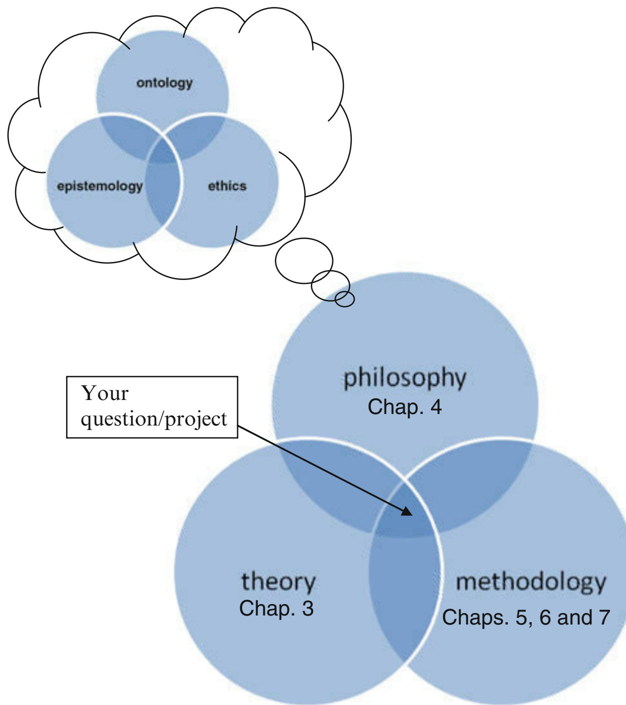


Fig. 4.1 Situating your activism project within several related frameworks or orientations

action between yourself and your students such that collective knowledge construction is valued as a means of extending what the students already know. In contrast, in the second instance, your method of observation may be around how quickly students learn the material delivered by the teacher. Your focus might be on deciding upon a plan of action in which students are given further tutoring if they are not demonstrating that they have learnt the material. In each instance, you would be working from a different philosophy of education. Likewise, in the health professions, as a critical theorist, you might focus on learning about the context in which clients experience disparities in service delivery for the purpose of creating a more equitable and humane health-care system (Olshansky et al. 2005). Whereas, as someone who believes that reproduction of the status quo is a foundational value of society, your focus might be on customer complaints and lawsuits in order to narrow gaps in expectations about service delivery as well as to reduce costs and improve efficiency.

Interestingly, practitioners who espouse critical roots will frequently engage in practices that maintain dominant paradigms, like the critical literacy teacher who asks students to line up in two lines, boys and girls, or establishes competitive teams, boys versus girls, in each case unwittingly and unquestioningly reproducing a very particular theory of sex, of gender and of gender hierarchy. In the case of competitive teams, such actions would also be reinforcing a particular theory of competitive learning and success rather than that of cooperative learning.

As presaged above, philosophy is a discipline concerned with:

- The nature of reality (ontology).
- What counts as knowledge (epistemology).
- How we should live (ethics).

You may be familiar, at least by name, with many philosophical doctrines such as rationalism, realism, idealism, existentialism, scepticism, pragmatism and post-structuralism. There are several branches to philosophy, but the three we are working with here are ontology, epistemology and ethics. If you are a teacher, your orientations in each of these make up part of your philosophy of teaching and teacherhood. If you are a social worker, likewise, your philosophy of social work is constructed in terms of your ontological, epistemological and ethical orientations, and so on, for whatever cultural profession you are part of. In the case of the teacher then, your ontological, epistemological and ethical orientations will determine your understandings of what a teacher is, what teaching is, what a learner is, what learning is, what is valuable knowledge, what pedagogies are available in your classpace (lisahunter 2011), what forms of assessment count and why. Much of what you take for granted and the assumptions that underpin your profession come from particular philosophical orientations. We tend to be quite poor at conceptualising and talking about what these standpoints or orientations are, yet they are the foundational 'taken-for-granteds' of our beliefs, attitudes and actions. Western society is generally either ill-prepared or apathetic to philosophical discussion. The more dominant form of scientific endeavour, positivism, that developed during the Enlightenment (between 1650 and 1700 and also known as the Age of Reason) played down the very existence of philosophical orientations such as ontology.

Ontology

Ontology is a branch of philosophy that asks questions about what exists. Ontology considers our understanding of what the nature and essential properties and relations of all beings are, and the principles and causes of being. Ontology is 'the science of what is and of the kinds and structures of the objects, properties and relations in every area of reality' (Smith 2003, p. 155). To look more broadly, when talking about the nature of reality, Western social scientists adopt one of several ontological standpoints including:

- Empiricism, or the idea that we can observe the world and assess those observations in relation to facts
- Positivism, which focuses on the observations themselves, devoted more to claims about facts than to facts themselves
- Realism, which holds that facts are out there just waiting to be revealed
- Postmodernism, the idea that facts are constantly changing and hard to pin down, so that we should focus *only* on our observational claims

Ontologically, mainstream Western scientific societies tend to draw on the first three orientations within our systems of schooling, medicine, health, welfare and business where cultural professionals work. The inclusions and definitions of categories we use, such as nurse/dentist, teacher/learner, teacher/student, adult/child, doctor/patient, provider/client and community activist/politician, are framed by these ontological orientations. And it is at an ontological level that we understand relationships of being or existence to define such categories. For instance, you will have certain ideas about who belongs in a classroom, probably a category called teacher who has certain roles and responsibilities towards another category called student. In another example, if you are a social worker, you would have particular understandings about which of the following categories of people appropriately belong in a case meeting to discuss the health and living needs of a mentally ill client: doctor, dentist, case worker, psychologist, housing officer, pet, mother, chiropractor, bus driver, client, speech therapist, parole officer, neighbour, housemates and janitor. However, if we surveyed people across age ranges, geographical spaces and cultures (and if we could, across history), there would be variance in how these contexts are defined, how the categories of person are defined and the relationship between the categories, if indeed these categories even existed.

In relation to your project, consider how we routinely think about people. We might say that students, teachers, social workers, patients, management and clients exist as categories of people who have certain properties and relations to other categories of people. We routinely think that things exist in terms of nouns, say school or hospital. School implies a collection of categories such as teachers and students. Hospital implies the categories of nurses, doctors, patients and counsellors. Our ontological standpoint then is the foundation of our understanding of what exists and how these things (or people) are in relation to each other. But that does not mean that there is only one fixed way to consider such categories and relationships, or even be locked into those categories and relationships. There may be other ontological orientations to consider beyond your own or that of the dominant way of thinking. It may be that your project's changes will come about through an ontological shift in such ways of being, for instance, changing the relationship between teacher and student, or social worker and local community. It may be that you change who gets to count as belonging to the category 'nurse' or who can do the work that currently those called 'nurse' do. To pick up on the example above, it may be that a shift in your understanding of the categories of people who appropriately belong in a case meeting might bring a whole new range of possibilities into that case meeting context, for example, including the janitor in the case meeting may bring a whole new set of insights.

Just as these categories have been created, they can be recreated or eradicated. They are not necessarily universal over time or geography. Your willingness or unwillingness to accept the last sentence is an indication of whether your understanding of the nature of reality is objective (things exists 'out there') or subjective (things exist 'in the mind' and in the culture's agreements about what does and does not exist and their relation). This orientation, in turn, determines what questions and answers you can come up with in your PA^{t}R venture.

Epistemology

Epistemology comes from the Greek word episteme. Epistemology is the study of knowledge and how it is produced, acquired, validated and maintained. It is a branch of philosophy that asks questions such as 'what do we know?', 'what is knowledge?', and 'how is knowledge gained?' Within our systems of health, education, business, welfare and government, knowledge gets separated into theoretical reason, or knowing *that*, and practical reason, or knowing *how*. Theories of knowledge acquisition include:

- Empiricism, that knowledge is founded in one's experience, particularly based on one's own senses (believe it if you see it).
- Rationalism, that knowledge is reasonable, that is, able to be reasoned and knowledge is intellectually, logically and deductively available rather than through sensory means.
- Constructivism, that knowledge is socially constructed, and therefore, it is contingent on social experience, convention and human perception.

If knowledge is acquired through empirical research, you would expect that particular observable instances have been recorded and the weight of evidence provides us with some factual information. An example of this would be where a large number of people are measured for cholesterol and lean/fat body ratio so we can 'know' whether or not they are obese and hence whether it is accurate to say there is an 'obesity crisis' that should drive public health initiatives. However, should you be using a constructivist orientation, you might look to what contextual factors have led to a perception of an obesity crisis and how might a crisis and the category 'obese' be constructed.

The different epistemological orientations expose some of the politics inherent in knowledge, in what we know, in how it is acquired and whose interests are being met or ignored. For example, an empiricist is limited by their senses and by the mechanisms by which they can observe. This orientation then depends on where the researcher 'looks' and the particular nature of the tools of observation that are used to reveal what is there. We may 'measure' misbehaviour of students in the classroom (empiricism) or attempt to understand why the curriculum is not engaging for young people (constructivism). The issue might be students not focusing on their set work but where and how we look at the issue will be driven by what questions we ask and what orientations we take. The profession through which you have learnt to see the world will have oriented you to knowledge in a particular way. This orientation helps maintain the knowledges and values around those knowledges of that profession, yet there may be other orientations that become the focus of your research, orientations that expose otherwise unseen issues, orientations that provide new answers to old problems or orientations that create new knowledge for your profession. You will no doubt be familiar with the saying 'think outside the box'; this is shorthand for 'go beyond what is already known by taking a different philosophical orientation, that is, looking at the same thing differently'.

Taking a PA^{t}R approach means that there is a learning process around real and material changes such that the outcomes of practice inform understandings. Further, the PA^{t}R approach accommodates the understanding that social practices are 'located in and are the product of, particular material, social, and historical circumstances that produced them and by which they are reproduced in every day social interaction in a particular setting' (Kemmis and McTaggart 2005, p. 565). The different ways of knowing, as the social practices that you draw on as part of your PA^{t}R project, might include experiential knowledge (by being present or participative), practical knowledge (how to do something), propositional knowledge (concepts) and presentational knowledge (imagery, symbols). An important start to your project, then, is understanding what:

Ways of knowing
Orientations to knowledge
Knowledges
That you draw on

You must be unafraid to question these, that is, question their taken-for-granteds, the politics inherent in the orientations, and what this means for your practices and the practices of the project.

Ethics

Ethics is another branch of philosophy, one that focuses upon the nature of values relating to human conduct. In *Practical Ethics*, Peter Singer (2011) alerts us to the danger that ethics can be seen as 'all very noble in theory but no good in practice' (p. 2). He points out that an ethics has to afford the 'best consequences' in the context of advancing and protecting the interests of those most at risk (2000, p. 15). Peter Singer's is a view somewhat akin to that of emancipatory and social justice politics. Broad principles to guide ethical decision making are an important beginning point to consider as part of your project. You may begin with principles such as mutual respect, non-coercion and non-manipulation (House 1993), or those suggested by Helen Simons (2000, p. 54) 'to honor and respect the individuals from whom data is gathered' while 'acknowledging the need to report publicly so that others could learn from the outcomes'. Your ethical principles, whatever they are, act as an initial guide to your decision making while also acting as a check to your other philosophical and theoretical orientations. For example, you may choose an overt observation technique rather than a covert one such as used by Laud Humphreys (1970) in his controversial ethnography *Tearoom Trade* that was based upon disguised observations of homosexual behaviour in public restrooms, as this is more in concert with the principle of respect for the participants.[1] Or your ethics may guide you to negotiate

[1] Martin Bulmer's (1982) Social Research Ethics examines the merits and dilemmas of covert or secret participant observation using actual examples of research such as Laud Humphries' infamous Tearoom Trade (1970) for anyone contemplating whether it is justified.

(rather than impose) a research problem and the criteria for evaluating the solution by inviting stakeholders to take part in and influence all aspects of the decision-making process. Notice that as your ethical principles guide you in a particular way, your ontological and epistemological orientations will have a particular flavour, and vice versa, your ontological and epistemological orientations will guide your ethics.

Going beyond the broad principles or codes, Helen Simons and Robin Usher make an argument for a situated ethics that is 'local and specific to particular practices. It cannot be universalized, and therefore any attempt to formulate a theory of situated ethics, given that any theorization strives for universality, must be doomed to failure' (2000, p. 2). They recognise the variety of social practices involved in research and so encourage us to grasp the sets of ethical issues pertinent to specific situations. As such, there is no formula or universal set of rules for you to follow, but there is a responsibility for you to position yourself clearly in the project and even declare your ethical dilemmas and decisions.

> Researchers cannot avoid weighing up often conflicting considerations and dilemmas which are located in the specificities of the research situation and where there is a need to make ethical decisions but where those decisions cannot be reached by appeal to unambiguous and univalent principles or codes (Simons and Usher 2000, p. 2).

Ethics is more than following procedures for bureaucratic purposes. Rather, as we pointed out earlier in Chap. 2, it is a situated, experimental and relational form of interpersonal politics. This is not to say that documentation is not important. However, it is more than gaining access to knowledge by complying with your organisation's ethics policy and getting someone to sign a form. Instead, it can become a goal of social justice, which is based in recognition and respect, particularly for the cultural protocols and practices of First Nation communities. Here, as always, consultation is key if you do not know where to begin. Being as informed as possible about the local community and the issue or problem that you and/or the community want to change, and the specific context in which it sits, helps you identify the potential ethical dilemmas as you ponder the decisions that need to be made and the actions that must be taken.

As a cultural professional and as a researcher, you are able to gain privileged access to various forms of information about those with whom you are researching. Along with this privilege comes a very important responsibility to use that information appropriately. This involves, amongst other things, protecting the identity of the individuals involved and making sure that your privileged information cannot be used to disadvantage or harm the participants in any way. It is your duty, as a PA^{t}R researcher, to be highly ethical in your accessing, storage and use of all information you gain during your project. There is a particular need to be aware of the participants' right to informed consent and their ability to withdraw from the project at any stage, without the need for explanation or penalty. Basically, this means that you cannot involve in your project someone who has not given you written permission to create data involving them. This includes institutional rights: You should seek permission from the institutional 'gatekeeper' such as the school principal or organisational manager, for example, before proceeding with your research in that context. If your research involves community members, you need to seek their consent, and if you

want to create data on children, you will generally need to inform parents/caregivers of the research and seek their written approval. Researchers working with and for young people will also argue for you seeking their consent, not just that of their legal guardians. Obviously, this reflects a particular ontological, epistemological and ethical position that you might also consider.

Your profession will have some form of ethical procedure that you must follow, and your professional colleagues should be able to guide you as to the appropriate gatekeeper/s to approach and consent to secure. Even if the focus of the research is your own practice, it will not be carried out in a vacuum. Considering those who will be participating in your research, using broad ethical principles such as those outlined earlier and then considering the context and your profession's expectations will guide your planning of actions. Some institutions, such as medical or school boards, systemic bureaucracies or universities, may also require specific ethics clearance. It is important to identify whether this is the case for your project as soon as possible, both as a source for guiding your project and because the process may take some time that you need to consider before the action phase can begin. As a matter of course, your research proposal should address ethics and make explicit your ethical orientation, as should any form of reporting. Chapter 9 will outline some of the ethics procedures you may need to complete before conducting your research, such as negotiating access to the research site, discussing ethics procedures with a professional colleague or designing information and consent letters. However, we cannot stress enough the importance of you identifying and articulating your ethical intentions: intentions that clearly relate to some of the other philosophical perspectives we have explored above. So we encourage you to read to further explore the philosophical tenets on which you base your work.

In summary, our ontological, epistemological and ethical orientations provide us a whole set of taken-for-granted assumptions about, for instance, management and grass-roots workers, or young people, schooling and classpaces, or clients, health specialists and therapy, or clients, social services, counsellors and social workers. Metaphors of practice can be peeled back to expose these taken-for-granted assumptions. For example, metaphors of students and teaching, doctors and nursing, police and social work, the government and caring for children and leaders and caring professions reveal the underpinning beliefs that a teacher, police officer, social worker, nurse, teacher educator or cultural professional carries into their professional workplace.

Returning to the CT (critical theory, Chap. 3) orientation with which the epistemological, ontological and ethical orientations relate, we re-emphasise that CT is clearly not objective or value-neutral but identifies itself explicitly with the social justice interests of the people we are involved with as professionals. Those who work with CT endeavour to explicitly position their work epistemologically, ontologically and ethically. This is not the case in many of the sciences. It is telling that many who work in theories of physiology, psychology, biology, business and engineering, for example, are unfamiliar with their philosophical orientations, although they are usually aware of the ethical requirements of their institution. One explanation is that these ways of knowing are dominant and therefore regarded as

'truth', hence not questionable. Another explanation is that Western societies are based on assumptions that took hold during the Age of Enlightenment, a phase from eighteenth-century Western philosophy where reason and rationalism were major influences upon attitudes and ideas. The assumptions of Enlightenment work to maintain the status quo of the Enlightenment project, modernism. Another explanation, related to the previous two, is the paucity of discussion in the public field, whether through ignorance of philosophy or the lack of opportunity to engage in philosophical discussions as important ways of knowing and questioning and changing the world. When embarking on PA^{t}R, however, our ethical, epistemological and ontological orientations are the very foundations and, therefore, topic of our initial pondering as they underpin the questions we ask, the answers we seek and the actions we take.

It is difficult to imagine one's philosophical orientations in a purely analytic or theoretical way. A way into understanding your own philosophical orientation is to look at the intent of your research project. For example, if you have the intent to engage those you interact with as part of your profession to enhance their learning, or to have their opinion heard, or to meet their needs (rather than your own), that is quite different to you deciding what their problem is and then acting to fix it (or them). In a school, a teacher might observe several students disengaging from learning. She/he might invite student feedback on the issues they have around learning, discuss and negotiate actions that might enhance their learning, including skills around discussion and negotiation, and then reassess who benefits from any changes that are made and who does not and how/why. The teacher sees the reality of disengagement and questions some of the pedagogical strategies and curriculum content available to the students so looks for ways to engage the students rather than assuming that they are inherently lazy, poorly behaved or of the wrong attitude. This is quite different to a teacher who locates the problem with students, makes generalisations about their behaviour and identity and seeks to put into place actions that sanction poor behaviour to ensure students tow the line and learn what the teacher teaches. In essence, such an approach locates the problem in the students, and hence the solution is to 'fix' them. In this example, critical theory encourages us to ask about the politics or power relationships of what is going on in the classpace (lisahunter 2011), schooling and positioning of young people with respect to society and knowledge. Ontologically, critical theory asks us to question who students and teachers can be. Some teachers would not consider students to have the skill to construct and negotiate their curriculum, but neither would they consider enabling them to do so. Epistemologically, a critical lens encourages us to ask whose knowledge counts when it comes to framing your research questions, or even deciding what the issue/problem/questions can be.

Likewise, a welfare worker might observe some young unemployed people engaging in disruptive behaviour in a labour market programme (Martin 2000; Jeffs and Smith 1999). In much public discussion today, young people are typically seen negatively, in deficit, and the 'answer', both in policy and practice, is usually to try to control and protect them (Jeffs and Smith 1999). So, for the welfare worker, this might include designing appropriate remedial and compensatory interventions for

those individuals in ‘need’ of help, if not imposing sanctions or simply removing them from the programme (Jeffs and Smith 1999). A critical theory approach looks beyond traditional problem-solving approaches embedded within such deficit focused programmes and looks at how the behaviour of the young people is shaped by the larger context which surrounds them. Similar to the above example, it then encourages the young people to look at how they are positioned as ‘citizens’ discursively and materially within an unequal set of power relationships in order to raise their political awareness and to give validity to their lived experiences.

A similar hypothetical situation can be pictured in a nursing or social work context. Imagine you are the cultural professional. You notice that certain clients with whom you work do not adhere to the health plan that has been given to them. Do you engage the clients themselves in understanding this phenomenon within their lifeworld and together find solutions? Or do you locate the problem in the clients and impose punitive measures to enforce adherence? A departure from the traditional medical/deficit approach (that focuses on quick fixes and the individual) might be to look at the root causes of inequality in health as well as the overall context of health-care policy and provision in order to empower clients to creatively deal with what is essentially a community problem. For example, poor nutrition in children might be seen as individual ignorance or as acceptable practices in junk food advertising that targets children.

A Metaphor to Help Locate Where You Stand

Think about when you were at school and reflect upon what metaphors you might use to make sense of who you were as a student. If you are currently studying as a pre-service professional, you can reflect upon that situation in terms of the metaphor/s you might use. Or alternatively, you might reflect on the profession that you are entering or working in to create a metaphor. For instance, in a school setting, you might be familiar with the ‘jug and cup’ metaphor: The teacher is the jug, full of knowledge, pouring its contents into the empty cups, who are the students. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1993) famously used the metaphor of the ‘banking model’ of education to highlight how traditional education (in his context at the time) reduced the student to merely an empty container or vessel into which the teacher or some other authoritarian figure makes ‘deposits’ of predetermined knowledge or ‘facts’. The jug and cup or banking models only work as metaphors if we believe knowledge to be fixed and already known, housed within the teacher and able to be communicated, or transferred, between teacher and student. Epistemologically, the teacher who relates to this metaphor would be drawing on empiricism or rationalism. Ontologically, she/he would probably have a realist approach, or possibly that of a positivist or empiricist, that is, she/he would understand knowledge to be out there, available through observation and able to be gathered and passed on.

Freire critiqued this model of education, noting that such an approach breeds passivity and inculcates students into a 'culture of silence' (1985) of unquestioning conformity or ignorance. Freire (1993) put it like this:

> The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them. (p. 54)

In contrast, you might be the teacher who relates more to a 'knitting a multicoloured jumper' metaphor for education. Here you believe there are many different knowledge threads that students bring to the classpace, while the teacher is the knitting needles, facilitating what becomes constructed by the collective. What is produced by the collective is something quite different from the original threads of wool. Another position might be that the teacher is just another thread and the needles are the education system. This orientation would indicate someone who is constructivist and postmodern. While this constructivist and postmodern orientation is certainly found amongst educators, it is not as common or easily found historically as the first more empiricist and positivist orientation. Recognising the more dominant orientation of jug and cup, probably the one which many of us have experienced, helps us understand why students are positioned within subject areas, the classroom, education and even our society, as silent, on-hold, deficit, still-developing and unproductive pawns in the big game of schooling. While you might see this as an extreme position to take, a close consideration of the many small and large ways that we position children as deficit reveals that it is common in many institutional contexts (see, e.g. Austin et al. 2003).

Through interacting with this chapter, we hope you will be brave enough to consider the possibilities, at least suspend disbelief and test where your own philosophical orientations come from and how they inform who/what you might be as a professional working in institutions or institutional systems. In summary, your standpoint or orientation is oriented by your politics, beliefs, values, understandings and intentions, and will therefore be orienting your practices and how you read your world. Although it is one of the most difficult and neglected topics in research and often neglected even in the human and social professional research, it is vital that you understand your own philosophical orientations. That is, if you wish to engage in 'making the difference' for people through your profession and in using PA^{t}R, you need to understand yourself first. Once some of this more difficult work is underway, the methodological frameworks and the choice and use of particular methods become much clearer. As you move into the next chapter, try to continue to grapple with these difficult concepts to make stronger links between theoretical, philosophical and methodological orientations for your project.

Guiding/Clarifying Questions

1. How would you define ontology, epistemology and ethics?
2. Why is it important to identify the ontological, epistemological and ethical orientations that dominate your profession?

3. What metaphors are common to your profession?
4. What are the dominant ontologies, epistemologies and ethics that dominate your profession?
5. What are your own philosophical orientations with regards to your profession? And how might these cause tensions if they are not those that dominate the profession you are entering or attempting to work within?
6. What are the philosophical orientations that reflect CT and PA^{t}R?
7. How do these orientations parallel, bump up against or clash with those of your profession or of the context in which you are attempting to apply a PA^{t}R project?

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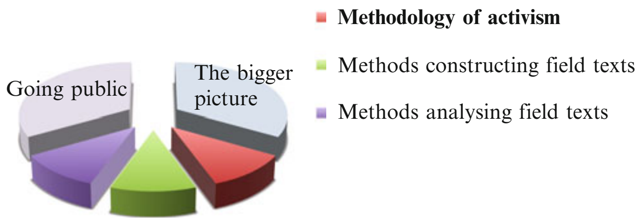
Part B
Doing this Stuff

Chapter 5
Methodology of Activism in Research

Section B: Doing this stuff



Despite the messy and at times chaotic nature of action research, the type of methodology we are advocating provides a dialogical, relational and imaginative pathway for critical awareness and operation in the world that is participatory/activist-orientated. We believe that the use-value of PA^{t}R lies in its power to generate knowledge that is capable of introducing change processes in everyday practice, no matter if this is a small-scale project in an individual classroom or clinical setting or something much larger like a HIV/AIDS campaign that potentially has national policy implications. The point is that you do not need to be involved in a large-scale intervention for PA^{t}R to matter or to make a difference. Indeed, Martyn Denscombe (2007) notes, 'Action research is normally associated with "hands on", small-scale research projects' (p. 122).

This chapter will make the distinction between methodology and method, showing their relationship to each other and to philosophical and theoretical orientations. In this chapter, we emphasise the cyclical and spiralling nature of AR, briefly describing the different approaches developed but settling on the basic 'understand/plan, act and observe and reflect' cycle. This is to suggest there is no 'one way' but a set of practices and principles that guide the methodology and choices of methods. To help bridge the gap between theory and practice, the following two chapters will provide some user-friendly and easily navigable

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method guidance for those of you engaging in PA^tR, no matter the scale of the project or the context.

Methods of constructing *field texts* (Clandinin and Connelly 2000; some call this data collection or data construction) include observations, interviews, critical incidents, critiqued incidents, ideology critique, surveys and document analysis. In Chap. 6, we show how some of these methods might look in practice. Many of the methods we discuss here might also be used in a positivist paradigm, but in PA^tR, we put them to particular work to answer particular questions that reflect a critical and emancipatory paradigm. Hence, as we saw when discussing researcher observations in Chap. 4, while field construction tools may look similar on the surface, they can be fundamentally different depending on the underlying philosophical orientations of the project team. In Chap. 7, methods of *research text* construction (aka data analysis) will also be listed and briefly described to illustrate the philosophical and theoretical differences between those that would be regarded to be emancipatory and those that would be regarded as positivistic.

Methodology

Methodology and method are often, incorrectly, used interchangeably or conflated. However, methodology is more than a set of methods for data construction and analysis. A methodology section in a report might include your rationale; your sociocultural, political and philosophical orientations; and the theoretical work that you will draw upon. Clearly, there is overlap between methodology; philosophical, social and political standpoints; and theory (revisit Fig. 4.1, Chap. 4). Often, your epistemological and ontological standpoint in your research proposal or project plan is made explicit in the writing up of your methodology (rather than a separate section of the report called 'epistemological and ontological orientations' with another section on 'theoretical orientations'). When considering methodology, you will consider all these things: rationale, philosophical orientations and theoretical foundations. When writing up your early plan and your final report, the methodology may also include a research plan and a literature review, the questions that drive the research and methods (see Fig. 5.1). Chapter 12 will give more guidance on writing the report, but for now, it is important to understand that some aspects of your work are present throughout the cycles, as filters that influence decisions and actions at all stages. Linearly, you might think of your methodology as that in the square box in Fig. 5.1with threads or filters throughout.

This figure is not meant to suggest that these elements are cleanly discrete, nor are they something that can necessarily be clearly established *before* the project begins. Often, a project report or thesis represents the separate elements as *cleanly* separate and delineated from the other elements, but you will find that as your

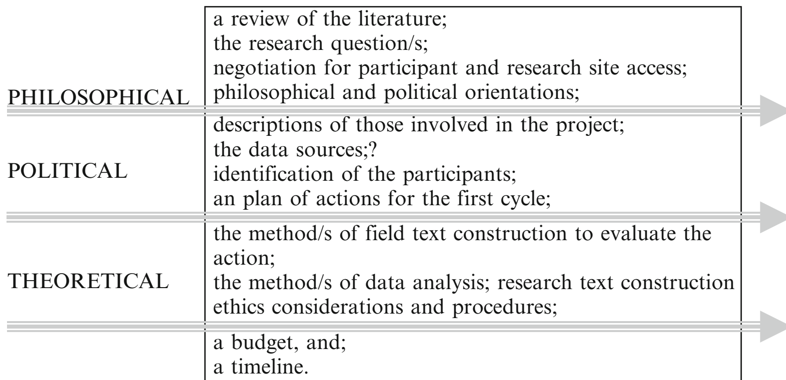

Fig. 5.1 Methodology box

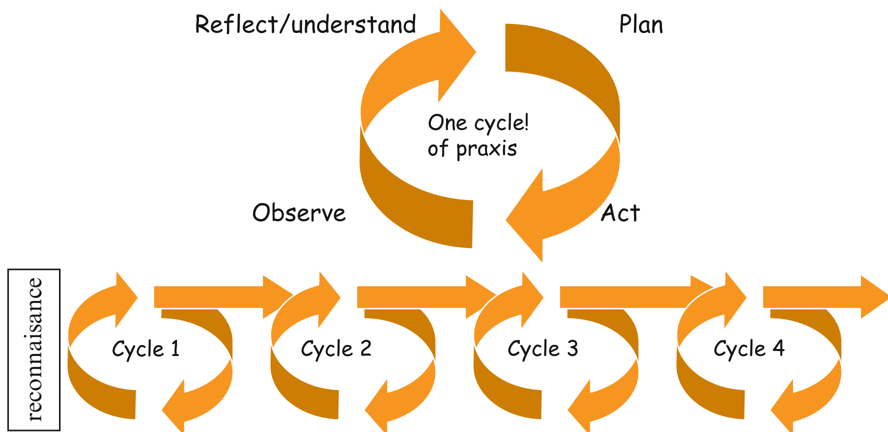

Fig. 5.2 Action research cycles (Adapted from Grundy 1995)

project progresses there is refinement, messiness and further clarification. However, it is important to attempt to establish as many of these elements as possible, as part of the 'understand and plan' phase, and then continue to clarify your thinking, and therefore your action, as the project moves through its cycles (see Fig. 5.2). These elements act as useful subheadings or headings to begin the clarification process and therefore the planning for action. More recently, this messiness has been captured within the reporting process and written in to the evaluation or reflection phase in sections or chapters titled 'the messiness of the research process', 'reflection on the process' or 'what we've learned about the research process … and where to next'. Hence, do not be frightened of the messiness; use the PA^{t}R process itself to explicate and clarify.

The Cyclical Nature of the Methodology

Action research is often described as a complex set of phased cycles that make a larger spiral of understanding, planning, acting and reflecting, each phase informed by praxis, or the dialectical interplay, between theory and the practice at each stage (see Fig. 5.2).

Preceding the first cycle however is the reconnaissance. We do not consider the reconnaissance a cycle as such, as no intervention takes place. Some AR models do treat the reconnaissance as a cycle in their research model. The purpose of the reconnaissance is to:

- Determine the initial idea for change, that is, identify the question/s, issue/s, problem/s or theme/s that your work is attempting to tackle and where you need to seek further information to develop your plan of action.
- Become informed through reading the literature that can expand your understanding about the context, issue, assumptions and theory.
- Observe the context to understand who and what you are initially working with and within.
- Reflect on the literature and the context to collectively negotiate what the PA^{t}R project will look like for each of the phases of the first cycle.

The reconnaissance, then, forms the backbone of your initial understand phase. Reconnaissance includes reading what others have done about this issue previously and reading to deepen your understanding of the particular ethical, theoretical and methodological concerns of your interest. The reconnaissance will then inform your planning for the first cycle.

As represented in Fig. 5.2 above, each cycle of action is informed by the preceding cycle. This means that a second cycle emerges from the first. Cycles are connected together in this way, and the work becomes more defined, refined, focused or, possibly, more broad ranging. You might think of the cycles forming a spiral rather than discreet cycles. This spiral process is a key to AR and its relatives such as PA^{t}R: You are continually evolving your inquiry and action based on information from your specific contextualised practices in the inquiry, from the reading that informs your project more broadly and from reflection using both. While these phases, when put together, form a cycle, it is essential that a project is not simply seen as a collection of cycles. Rather, the project evolves from one cycle to the next as you learn more about yourself as a practitioner, the context of the project and its participants, the process and practices of PA^{t}R and the outcomes of project action. While it is technically possible to start action research at any point or phase of the cycle, a reconnaissance will help to avoid false starts, early misunderstandings and unnecessary frustrations. However, it is NOT possible to devise your three or four cycles at the beginning of a project and simply implement them as planned. You cannot predict what will happen as you implement changes in your context, and therefore, you cannot know before completing cycle one what modifications to your deliberative action plan might be needed for cycle two. It is often uncomfortable to realise that

you cannot plan your next cycle of action until you are well into analysing your first one. However, we want to emphasise this very strongly: Reflection informs the next cycle. This is what good reflective practitioners do: They wait until they are in a position to take *informed*, deliberative action based on what has been learnt. Hence, as you implement change, you construct data that represents what is happening and, based on this data, reflect on what it means to you and your project (remember that ‘you’ here may be you as an individual, or in the spirit of a participatory project, ‘you’ will mean the team engaged in the PA^{t}R). Based on this reflection, you will make some decisions about what you try next time in order to improve your practices and those in the project. You will also call on this data as you reflect to better understand the nature of the social question, issue or problem you are investigating. The PA^{t}R process enables you to think about what you are doing, evaluates your actions and, then based on that evaluation and reflection, devises your next plan of action. This must be very clear in your practices as well as your documenting of the project – so even though, as we said, in practice PA^{t}R can be messy, you must be able to communicate a coherent sense of the project to those in the project and to those you are trying to communicate with, such as a supervisor, the community, an examiner, a contractor, professional colleagues or other interested parties (see Chap. 12). This may seem like a feat of smoke and mirrors, but your clear intent about what you are doing and why, that is, your clearly articulated standpoints and frameworks (see Chap. 4), will be the cohering agent (the ‘glue’ if you like) of the report of your PA^{t}R (more about that in Chap. 12).

Further to reflecting on the outcomes of the preceding cycle, good practitioners understand that essential to being informed is to read widely. It is critical that the very first thing you do is to read from an informed set of literature about your question/issue/problem/change. There is little sense in reinventing the wheel. Literature that informs your project should be from reliable sources so that you have an informed basis from which to plan. Newcomers to PA^{t}R will not know the extent of the depth and scope of literature if they are new to the topic, but a methodical literature review or systematic review of literature (see Chaps. 9 and 12) is one way of coming to understand something of this scope and depth. A practical way to organise and manage this reading, construct field texts and continually do more reading and reflection is to document everything you do under headings such as those in the methodology box (Fig. 5.1). Then, when you are working through the checklist in Chap. 9, you will have all your field texts, research texts and readings on hand.

At the understand/plan phases, it is vital that you have a critical awareness of the *discourses* informing the process (see Fig. 5.3). Here, we use the word discourse to mean communication that involves specialised knowledge of various kinds or very simply ‘ways of talking about things’. For example, medicine has a particular way of talking about illness, health and pathology – using particular language and based in certain epistemological and ontological assumptions. As we have already established, ways of talking about things, or of thinking about them, are influenced by one’s orientations. Questions like ‘who gains by how we understand the issue?’ and ‘who does not?’ or even ‘who gains/loses as a result of the issue/problem?’ become

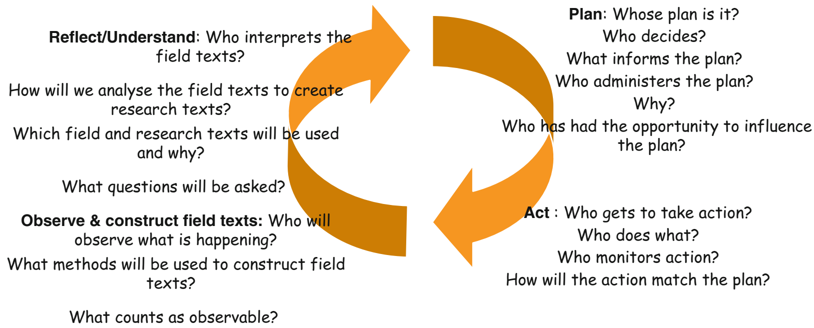

Fig. 5.3 Questions to ask within each phase

important drivers of the research as they ensure you maintain a critical awareness in your PA[t]R. We emphasise again – these questions are the *drivers*, not some afterthought.

Other questions might include:

- What are the power relations inherent in the issue?
- Who is privileged in the planning?
- Who gets to act and who does not?
- How do particular actions benefit specific groups or individuals but disadvantage others?
- Do the benefits of this project outweigh the potential risks?
- How are participants encouraged to reflect and whose reflections count?
- How do we come up with the research question initially?
- Who is asking the questions, that is, whose questions are they?
- Have all stakeholders been included and, if not, why not?

Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) describe the cycles in terms of the phases indicated above, that is, plan, act, observe and reflect. Others use differing degrees of detail to work through this process. An example of this is Elliot's (1997) use of five phases: identify initial idea, find out facts and analyse, general plan with action steps, monitor implementation and effects and reconnaissance. In essence, it does not matter how you label the phases of your cycles as long as the essential plan, act and reflect cycle is clear and that your dedication to informed practice and deliberative action is explicit in that your actions are based on data and research literature.

So How Do I Get Started?

Now that you have some sense of the big picture – reconnaissance, plan, act, observe, reflect, plan, act, observe, reflect, plan, act and so on – the big question is how do I get started?

In Chap. 9, you will be guided more specifically and simply in how to get started, but you would by now realise that with so many aspects to a PA^{t}R study, philosophical and methodological orientations and research cycles, there are many different places to start. *Observation* of practices in a particular context may trigger a project that then *evaluates* and *reflects* upon the observations. This then informs *planning* of new actions. Other projects might begin with uninformed *action* that raises many questions, so *observation* of these actions and then *reflection* and *planning* would come next. It is often difficult to initially frame the process of change for the project however. As we have indicated previously, we have found it very helpful to focus on a particular question, idea, theme, issue or problem that is identified within your own practice, profession or context. For example, using Freire's (1993) 'generative theme' approach to provide participants with the opportunity to identify, discuss and construct their own ideas or issues, your targets could include sexism, transphobia, racism, diversity or expert-student/client relationships. What matters here is that for Freire, 'generative themes' are powerful sites of 'conscientisation' as they assist, through dialogue and analysis, to break down prevailing mythologies of 'conventional wisdom', 'common sense' or what he also termed the 'culture of silence' that is perpetuated by traditional models of 'banking education' (see Chap. 4).

You can draw insight and inspiration from Freire's dialogical and problem-posing approach to education to challenge reductive and oppressive models in your own context of professional action. So, while the above examples are very broad areas (sexism, transphobia, racism and so on), they do indicate a starting point for the literature search that can inform how you might conceptualise the project. Alternatively, you might choose an issue more narrowly focused to your context, for example, in the classroom, you might encounter issues such as incomplete homework, only having a single text for a range of learners, poor communication processes in the classroom or some students not engaging with group work. A list of other themes, ideas or issues that might drive your project and have driven projects in the past is included in Table 5.1 below. Clearly, initiating PA^{t}R in certain contexts such as prisons will pose particular challenges (Fine and Torre 2006). But we hope these few examples help you to think about how you might get started co-investigating areas of shared concern.

As you will see in Chaps. 9 and 12, depending upon the context, it may be useful (or necessary) to frame your project as a *question* that drives the action, rather than using a problem or issue. For example, instead of working with an issue of digital texts and ethnicity in the classroom, as a very broad starting point, you might ask 'what are the challenges for students new to the culture in using digital texts and how might these be overcome?' If a research question narrows your focus too much or too soon, you might play with a research *puzzle* (Clandinin and Connelly 2000), a formulation of your interest in terms of what puzzles you about this situation. In the context of performing and documenting a PA^{t}R project for a tertiary qualification, emerald guides students through a refinement of their interests by focusing firstly on a topic, then framing this as a *puzzle* (what about this interests me) and then finally refining it as a research *question* (what specific aspect of this context am I investigating) (see Chaps. 9 and 12). Lastly, you might also want to work through using a

Table 5.1 Themes, ideas and issues for project focus

Hospital ward	Neighbourhood	School	Health agency	Prison
Safety of staff in psychiatric ward	Effective use of public space for different needs	Assessment communication between teachers for enhanced planning for student learning	Inter-agency communication for enhanced patient care	Reducing violence through prisoner-'worthwhile' projects
Efficacy of roster organisation and quality of work	Community capacity building for enhanced health	Effective classroom practices for engaged learning	Record keeping procedures that improve data access and patient follow-up in obese children	Inmate safety through peer support programmes
Patient handover procedures between ward and external care	Coordination of services for effective access by youth and elderly	Negotiated curriculum to connect learning to student's lived worlds	Enhanced post-hospital care using indigenous knowledges and relationships	Effective practices for connection to a civil society
Reduction of cross-infection	Enhanced development of transport resources to encourage safe physical activity	Schools working together in partnership with the wider community to challenge educational policy	Developing partnerships to address the unequal distribution of health disparities across populations	Suicide and harm prevention
Enhance patient care through a visitor programme that makes a ward functional but inviting	Making recreational parks safer	Challenging hierarchical governance structures in schools to increase the participation of young people	Using participatory theatre to address community health issues including domestic violence, alcoholism, HIV/AIDS, etc.	Developing human rights training programmes to promote awareness of refugee detention
Developing compassion amongst hospital staff, towards each other and towards the patients	Monitoring the community for good news and fostering happiness	Schools engaging in a dialogue with the wider community to confront racism and other forms of discrimination		See for example: Refugees and Asylum Seekers Participatory Action Research – RAPAR – a human rights organisation in the UK http://www.rapar.org.uk/links.html
Patient participation in designing wards, treatment protocols and nutrition procedures	Building scholarship programmes for disadvantaged youth			
	Adopting healthy practices across community agencies			

new idea as your organising project driver. Examples might include paired staffing to enhance safety of workers in the psychiatric ward, teaching maths through physical activity for enhanced engagement, integrating the health and physical education curriculum for greater knowledge connection, reducing cross-infection of patients through double-gloving, addressing middle schooling in a traditional school by using teacher professional development, enacting a democratic booking system for public space use and using ANT.com to coordinate services for the young and elderly in queer communities. Clearly, there are overlaps in these initiator strategies. How you get started will be less about which strategy you use to get started and more about the simple pragmatics of just finding somewhere to begin.

Principles to Guide Methodology

At all decision points in an activist research project, the philosophical, political, theoretical, methodological and social agendas should be explicit and clearly reflected within those decisions. As a guide, recall the seven key features of participatory research, as outlined by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) and discussed in Chap. 2, that the research is:

- A social process
- Participatory
- Practical and collaborative
- Emancipatory
- Critical
- Reflexive
- Aiming to transform both theory and practice (pp. 597–598)

Enhancing social justice also needs to be an apparent principle of your work. Social justice is an ambiguous term that has multiple meanings and definitions (see McLaren 1995; Sleeter 1986; Starr 1991), but at core it indicates that you are attempting to enhance life circumstances and change the systemic circumstances that reproduce the problem for a collective of people who are coming together to implement change. Said in another way, your project is attempting to reduce oppressive practices in particular for those who are already disadvantaged, disempowered or disenfranchised whether it be socially, economically, symbolically or culturally. Thus, all action is informed by careful and strategic planning based on what you understand about the issue and those involved in it. It is also about drawing on what is known about the issue beyond that of the participants' experiences. This includes you. All action is *deliberative,* in that it is based on careful and strategic planning that is itself based on your reflections on research texts and knowledge gained through your study of the literature of the field. Deliberation results in defensible decisions for action which can be judged as probably better than alternatives. Essential to this is reflection: that is, moving beyond just becoming aware of the issue to reflecting on actions and asking some purposeful political questions such as 'who benefits?' and 'what power mechanisms are occurring?'

As you move into the next two chapters, and as they give you direction in the construction of field texts and research texts, regularly check on your application of Kemmis and MacTaggart's (2005) key points above: that is, it is social, participatory, practical and collaborative; it is focused on change and improvement; it develops and includes a self-critical community; and it embodies praxis – critically informed committed action, that is, action informed by literature and theories beyond that of the group. Check also that the group theorises their own practice throughout the field text phase and tests their own assumptions. It is also important to note that research is explicitly political in nature, a point that is sometimes ignored in research but is upfront in PA^{t}R.

Guiding/Clarifying Questions

1. What is the difference between methodology and method?
2. What are some of the components of methodology?
3. How are philosophical positions or standpoints related to methodology?
4. What are the seven key features of this work, as outlined by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005)? What does each of these mean to your project team?
5. How is reconnaissance different to the understand/reflect part of the cycle?
6. What are the primary phases of the AR cycle and what are some of the important questions to attend to within each phase?
7. What is the difference between a field text and a research text?
8. How does this methodology reflect praxis?

Extending Your Reading

Alvesson, M., &. Skoldberg, K. (2000). *Reflexive methodology: New vistas for qualitative research*. London/Thousand Oaks/New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. St Leonards: Allen & Unwin.

Fals-Borda, O., & Rahman, M. A. (1991). *Action and knowledge: Breaking the monopoly with participatory action research*. New York: Apex Press.

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Stewart, A. (1998). *The ethnographer's method*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
Thyer, B. (Ed.). (2001). *The handbook of social work research methods*. London: Sage Publications.
Tripp, D. (1993). *Critical incidents in teaching: The development of professional judgement*. London: Routledge.
Weis, L., & Fine, M. (2004). *Working method: Research and social justice*. New York: Routledge.
For discussion on *data analysis,* see Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2001). *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. London/Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
Also, you can search the dedicated action research journals using the search term 'methodology'.

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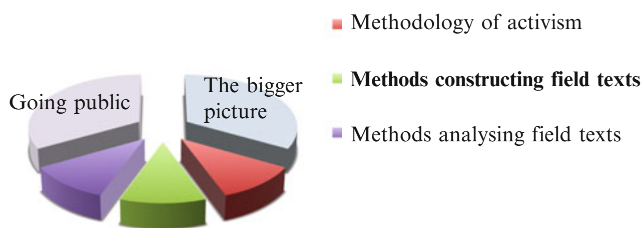
Chapter 6
Methods of Constructing Field Texts



As you can see from the discussion in the previous chapter, 'methods' are of two types: (1) methods for *constructing* field texts or creating evidence to understand what effect the action is having and (2) methods for *analysing* field texts to create *research texts* or ways of making sense of the evidence. In the previous chapter, we emphasise the cyclical and spiralling nature of the work, settling on the basic 'understand/plan, act and observe and reflect/evaluate' cycle. The first set of methods (constructing field texts) belongs more in the understand, act and observe phases of the cycle, whereas the methods that are focused on analysing field texts belong to the reflect/evaluate phase. We remind you that to do activist research, the kinds of decisions you make around the nature of some of these methods go back to your theoretical and philosophical orientations (Chaps. 3 and 4). In this chapter, we only touch on some of the methods that construct field texts. We encourage you to read more widely and in more depth around those methods that you use. All of these methods can be thought of as tools. They have vast literatures associated with them, hence the importance of searching the literature to see what has already been used and what you need to be mindful of when using these tools. You may adopt the same tools used in a project similar to yours. This chapter will not provide an exhaustive

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DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4426-4_6, © Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2013

list of methods that are available, but will arm you with a solid repertoire of tools for constructing field texts as a beginning PA^{t}R^{er}.

As you come to understand the methods described below, you will also come to see how a method can be utilised within an emancipatory PA^{t}R project quite differently from the way it might be taken up in a project that would be regarded as positivist. As we have repeatedly emphasised, it is important that you begin to recognise the ontological, epistemological, ethical, theoretical and political differences between an interview or survey founded in PA^{t}R principles and an interview or survey using a positivist foundation, for example.

In many texts, you will see the terminology ‘data collection’ rather than data construction. However, as many theorists from the critical traditions will point out, as researchers, we are socially constructing evidence in the act and observe phases in order to be able to analyse the effects of the action in the reflect phase. Different methods will create different evidence, sometimes referred to as sets of data. But we prefer to use Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) term ‘field texts’ to recognise, not only that we construct these texts but that they tell only a part of the story of what is going on. The term ‘data’ feels like something that is finite and definable. When dealing with human research, as you will find, ‘data’ is seldom finite nor easily definable. Similarly, different forms of analyses will ask different questions of the same field texts and therefore create one of several possible research texts. It is for these reasons that ‘data construction’ or ‘the construction of field texts’ seems a more honest description.

Here, we consider field text construction in terms of:

1. Systematic observation (you watch and record the context)
2. Surveys and questionnaires (you create focused information via ‘pen and paper’)
3. Interviews (you ask specific questions)
4. Narrative inquiry (you gather participants’ stories or live alongside the participants to understand their world)
5. Critical incidents (you focus on a particular event)
6. Document collection (you gather pertinent documents that already exist at the research scene)

Systematic Observation

Broadly speaking, systematic observations are when the researchers systematically monitor events and practices that relate to the project and have some method for recording them. Recording tools can include various schedules and checklists and less formal methods such as diaries, journals and field notes. The following sections provide basic information about several of these foundational forms of data construction.

The keys to systematic observations are the purpose and focus of the study. When deciding what information to gather, and how, you will need to consider:

- The purpose of the study
- A schedule of observations
- The focus of the observations (e.g. workers, clients, teacher, students, others or combinations)
- The frequency of observations
- How observations will be recorded
- The duration of observations

These considerations will guide you in developing the observation tools you use. A general principle is to use a range of tools to capture different features of the context.

Frequency and Duration of Observations

Observations can use either continuous or 'snapshot' processes. As its name suggests, a continuous systematic observation strategy involves the observer constructing data on the phenomena without any break in observation. In contrast, 'snapshot' systematic observations provide a number of discrete pictures of the phenomena. These discrete 'snapshots' may be produced through observations separated by a planned time span (e.g. 5 min on then 5 min off or 1 min observed out of every five) or alternatively may involve you looking at a sample of the phenomena (e.g. you observe interactions between inmates in a prison only during meal breaks or a particular activity). Snapshot methods are most appropriate when you are constructing data while also performing other duties (e.g. doing ward visits, running a youth group meeting, teaching a lesson). Observing continuously is really only possible when you are fully involved in just data construction (i.e. not doing something else as well).

Proximity of Knowledge: Biases, Inferences, Values, Beliefs, Objectivity and Subjectivity

Since your aim is to produce a description (and make interpretations) that will be seen by others as a reliable representation of what happened, it is important that you monitor how your biases, values, beliefs and expectations are colouring what you think you are observing. This is where your orientations are clearly influential. For example, you may observe a client in a focus group discussion interrupting another

client and conclude that the first person is aggressive. However, it could be that the first person has been bullied for some time before lashing out. As you might not have access to this information, you are limited in what you have been able to observe. Hence, your recorded observation needs to be just that – just what you observed, not your interpretation. Later when you make an interpretation, it must define the limits of your observation. Similarly, when you develop a rapport with a client or student or fellow worker, it is likely that you will interpret their behaviours rather than observe them and, further, interpret them in a very different manner from a client or student or fellow worker you do not like (often called the 'halo effect'). It is very tempting to interpret rather than observe, and it is wise to carefully review and monitor your own (and each other on the team) observations. Part of being a good PA^{t}R researcher involves an ability to monitor how your subjective interpretations may give you a less proximate knowledge of what is going on.

Some observations can be more objective, that is, it is easier to make proximate judgments such that others can readily agree with you. Such matters include things like the number of chairs or people in the room, the colour of the paint on the walls, and the number and location of hand basins in the hospital ward. Most of these involve checklists and category systems using coding schemes and quantitative judgments. Subjective decisions, or qualitative judgments, may be open to further question. Qualitative judgments might include whether meeting participants were engaged in the decision-making process, how attractive the new wards designs are and whether the participants were busy, cooperative or conscientious. As a researcher, you must reveal the evidence for these observations – remembering, for example, that a student gazing out a window might not be evidence of disengagement; they could be thinking very deeply about the lesson. This is why more than one source of information is wise, for example, the gazing student's output for the lesson might reflect engagement or disengagement. What this example shows is one of the *limits* of this method. As an informed researcher, it is your role to be aware of the limits of any methods you use. All methods have limits.

We are not necessarily even aware of the inferences we make when we make interpretations and draw conclusions from our observations. If you are unaware of your inferences, you are allowing unconscious bias to take over. As cultural professionals, we make inferences about our clients, patients or students, for example:

- Mr Boyd is unhappy in the hospital because he is only a wardsman.
- The work schedule is not suitable for this group of inmates.
- The use of materials does not support learning for the female students.

The validity (or proximity) of these inferences depends on the quality of the observations upon which they are made, as well as the degree of reflection undertaken by the professional and co-researchers. Where there are sustained observations and reflective practices to support the inference, there is a better chance of proximity. Check on your own inferences when making judgments about the clients, patients, co-workers or students with whom you work. On what grounds are you making these judgments? Often, stereotypes can pervade such judgments. For example, you might assume that the neatly presented client who comes to your

service is a certain sort of person, for example, that she comes from a 'good' family and is probably well educated, and then go on to make further inferences based on this assumption.

Systematic Observation Tools

Observation is commonly used in the reconnaissance phase to find out what is going on and as a precursor to using more specific methods. It may be used as a primary method or a supplementary method especially when the main purpose of the field text is to create a description. A *participant observation* is one where you are a member of the observed group. Some researchers deny any affect of their presence and consider themselves as non-participant observers. However, you are always present and will have some effect just by being there, even if you are just standing on the sidelines watching. Whether you are fully involved in the activity of the context or more distant, you will need to use tools that provide rigorous and systematic field texts. You will later be using these field texts to create research texts in a more formal moment of analysis.

The observational tools we will overview here are:

- Field notes
- Observation schedules
- Context maps
- Tables and checklists
- Diaries

Field Notes

Field notes are used to provide a description of the research context and may include the layout of the space, the activities of the actors, the names or roles of actors, individual actions, sequence of events, feelings of actors, what actors seem to be trying to achieve and your own feelings. Your field notes may focus on a particular feature of the context, that is, what is under observation at the time, or your field notes may be a general description from which concerns and issues are later identified. When taking field notes, it is common to provide too generic a picture of the context. As a researcher, your notes need to be rich or 'thick' in that they provide some evidence of the culture you are investigating. This is something of a balancing act. Consider the two different youth group observations in the following table:

While the two descriptions describe the events of a group meeting, the second observation is fuller and gives a better description of the behaviours being recorded. The first observation could suggest that there is little organisation and that learning occurring is minimal. The second observation is richer in description and could suggest that there is an independence of learning being expected of participants.

Your rich and thick observations will be directed by your background reading, your experience in the context and the question/problem/issue on which your

Unpractised observer	Experienced observer
• Participants are making a lot of noise, and the facilitator is not making good use (or any use) of instruction time. Participants are talking a lot and over each other • Some go off to get things from the back room and play with the air hockey game on the way back • Some participants leave the room – I think to go to the toilet • Some of the participants are making paper aeroplanes and then trying to fly them	Date: Jan 29, 2010 Time 11.30 a.m.–1.00 p.m. Group: Star City youth group, 28 participants Facilitator: Sam Fields, aged about 43, senior youth group social worker for 20 year and Ali Smith, age 25, local health worker for 2 year Demographics: 22 males aged 16–22, six females aged 17–19, one male with high needs and on parole and three males in juvenile detention for 3 months. Group in low-SES area, most participants from low-SES families Meeting room layout: Participants sit in groups of 4–6. Space is in the middle of room for whole group work, discussions, etc. Six clusters of tables are scattered around room. Two single tables are at front. Facilitator's desks are at rear on either side of the room. Storeroom at back of room also holds equipment and is used for withdrawal of participants for individual work and interviews. Recreation area at rear of room has art supplies and air hockey table. Facilitator (F) works in a team environment with a variety of visitors including a literacy support teacher (L) and a health worker (H) in joint planning and activity organisation. Room schedule for the group is pinned to the entry door (see attached) *Observations:* @ 5 min F begins the session a little late – instructs participants to write down their 'wins' for the past 2 days and then moves around the group clockwise asking for one example. F then asks each to identify one difficulty they have had recently with either their feelings or physical health and asks for as many descriptive words as possible @ 10 min

<table>
<tr>
<td>• The literacy support teacher comes in and talks to two of the males
• Facilitator stands on chair to get attention, gives instructions and then sits at a desk at the back of the room. F does not interact with participants and seems to be writing</td>
<td>H talks to the group about some of the social, emotional and physical problems common to youth in this area and hands out a small card with a list of the services that the participants can access. J and S make planes out of them, while the rest read through them. Around the room, a series of posters and pamphlets are spread
@ 15 min
Participants are directed to grab a drink and biscuit and to look around information posters and pamphlets. L talks to J and S asking whether the info on the card was useful
@ 20 min
Time is given for paired discussion
@ 25 min
All are reassembled to look and listen to F who stands on a chair and waits to be heard
@ 30 min
Participants are asked to move to one of six tables that have been rearranged around the room in the break, each with a health issue on it. Butcher paper and a set of questions lay in the middle of the table, and the facilitator asks each group to now list on the left side what they know about the health issue and list on the right side what questions they still have
@ 35 min
H circulates amongst the groups asking questions and giving specific answers. F is at back of room making observation notes (later – check what was included) for the annual service review</td>
</tr>
</table>

research is focused. The deeper your understanding of what you are studying, the finer the 'tuning' of your instruments of observation (your eyes, your ears and so on), the more systematic your use of the tools and the greater the quality of your work. Advance planning and practice of your observation strategy and your method of recording increases the likelihood of producing rich and thick descriptions that allow a proximate knowledge of what occurred. Even richer descriptions can be achieved by having several observers working at the same time and then comparing notes or using recording equipment to capture the context and then taking notes using pause and rewind. If you are in a position to have another person do some observations, it will provide a useful source of data for you as another's eyes may see differently to yours.

Observation Schedules

A trap for beginner researchers can be scrappy and unorganised recording of observations. Start by organising your observations according to some specific criteria that will later be relevant to you. These might be around:

- Time, such as early meeting, group activity, regroup discussions and reporting back
- Particular person, such as the four least engaged participants
- Particular behaviours, such as asking questions
- Use of space
- Actors/participants
- Feelings, yours (you cannot know another's feelings, but you can gather evidence that suggests their feelings)
- Actions

A simple start-up observation schedule might look like Fig. 6.1.

As your project develops, you may focus your observations more tightly on a specific feature of the context, for example, a teacher's questioning techniques or students' on-task behaviour.

Group/Event:… ….. Location…………………………………..Date:……………...
Time:…………….. Topic of focus:………………………………Actors:…………
Description of space (attach a map or photograph if needed)
…………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………
Personal reflection at end of this session………………………………………………..
…………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………
To follow up on: ……………………………………………………………………….
…………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………
Running description of observations:
1.
2.

Fig. 6.1 Observation schedule for youth group

Silverman (2000) suggests two ‘generations’ of field notes:

1. Recording what was observed
2. Expanding the notes beyond the immediate observations

The systematic ways that the field notes are expanded are to incorporate what people, events or situations are involved; the main issues arising from the contact; what speculations were suggested and what sorts of information should be sought in the next contact. A simple way to facilitate this two-generation approach is to record your field notes on the left page of your diary or journal and leave the right for later reflection, questions, inferences, responses, feelings and intuitive analysis. This provides data about your own subjectivity and how your philosophical, theoretical and methodological orientations as a researcher are constructed. These are also useful observations upon which to reflect at particular points of the project, and this note-taking method allows for easy retrieval of either observations or expanded notes as required. Silverman also suggests you might record how you responded and were treated within the context in a separate reflective section along with any intuitive analyses (analytic hunches) at particular points.

Your field note diary can also include other information that you have gathered. These might be other systematic observation tools and materials that have been relevant to participants (handouts, newsletters, information sheets, assignments). Scanning the notes prior to successive visits to a data construction point refreshes your memory of the previous events and sharpens your awareness of the nuances of the context about to be observed and recorded. These notes also provide a longitudinal thread of story to the study.

Context Mapping

Context mapping is another form of systematic observation. A simple map of the context becomes both a record of the context and a recording device. Things such as movements around the context, who talks, who asks questions and so on can be recorded on the context map itself. For example, a tick on the map for each time the focus of the research is observed (say, raising a hand to answer a question). At the end of the scheduled time, the ticks can be tallied according to the focus of the research and a description subsequently constructed (Figs. 6.2 and 6.3).

You will probably find that the further you progress on your project and refine your interests, the more complex and/or focused your mapping strategies and other observational tools will become. For example, the research on teacher questioning shows that in most school classrooms, 80 % of questions are asked to male students. While this is an interesting ‘fact’, it does not say much about the nature or *types* of questions asked. As the teacher or facilitator, you might have a suspicion that you ask lots of low-level questions to male students as a behaviour management strategy. To find this out, you would develop a coding system (keep it simple so you can quickly record the data needed) for the types of questions being posed, for example, ‘B’ for behaviour management, ‘L’ for low-level recall-type questioning and ‘H’ for

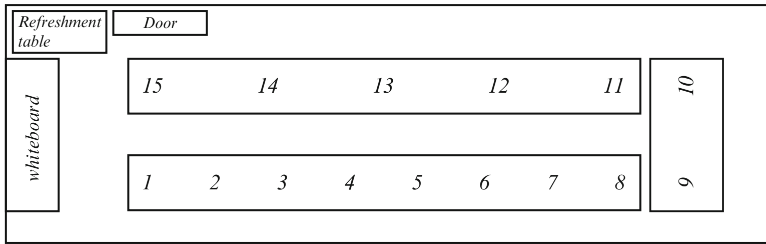

Fig. 6.2 An example of a context map in a community meeting

Name	Questions asked	Questions answered	Nature of comment	Other notes
1				
2				
3				
4				
etc				

Fig. 6.3 Example of coding sheet to accompany context map and capture who asks what questions

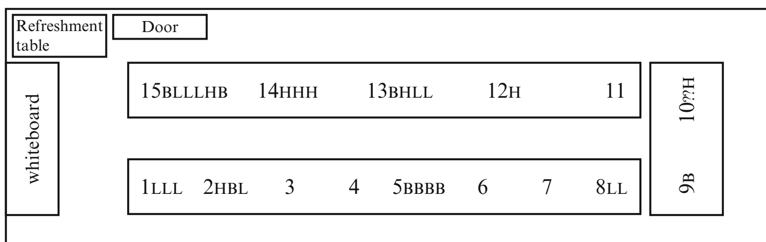

Fig. 6.4 A context map with coded information about teacher questioning (Key: *B* behaviour management question, *L* low level recall type question, *H* higher level reasoning question? Unsure how to code this question)

questions that demand a higher level of reasoning. Such a system is clear for the observer and makes recording observations easy. You might also need a category like '?' for questions that cannot easily be classified. To use this strategy, you would still record on your map of the context. However, instead of simply using a tally, you write down the code for each instance (see Fig. 6.4). You can even build up multiple coding systems such that you are collecting many different types of information at once and recording them all on your map.

a simple tally ~~1111~~ ~~1111~~ 111

b Coded Tally: BBBCWLCLBCCCCCCC

c Simple table based on Sex

Females	Males
BB WL BCC	BCCLCCCCC

d More elaborate table based on sex, arrival time, and type of transport sequence record on timescale

Time	30 min early	25	20	15	10	5	0 Clinic opens	5+	10+
Female	BB	BCL	LC					BBB	B
Male				CC C	CC	CL	C		

Fig. 6.5 Different ways to record the arrival of clients at a clinic (Key: *B* arrived by bus, *W* arrived by walking, *C* arrived in own car, *L* got a lift in someone else's car)

Context mapping can also be used to construct a sociogram, that is, a record of interactions in the site under study. This can be particularly useful for identifying social issues and problems in a workplace, classroom, institution or group. For example, if your concern is the differential distribution of nursing attention on a ward, you might map the movement of nurses around the ward, the time each spends with each patient, together with which patients call out or push their buzzer. This will document the relation between nursing attention and the patients' call for attention (or not).

Tables and Checklists

When constructing data on simple things, a table can be useful to provide some quick and shallow information. Tables are a way to collate fairly general information and so are more likely to be useful in the early stages of your research (e.g. during reconnaissance or cycle one). For example, you may be managing a council immunisation clinic and want to know if there is a pattern in how people travel to the clinic as part of your overall concern to ensure the clinic is easily available to the people who need it. A simple starting point might be to ask clients as they arrive and use a table where you place a simple tally mark (see example a, Fig. 6.5), or you use a little more information, say B (bus), W (walk), C (own car) or L (lift in someone else's car) (see example b, Fig. 6.5). You might think it may be relevant to distinguish this information in terms of female and male clients, hence using a simple table like that illustrated in (c) Fig. 6.5.

Finding an inequality using such a crude distinction as females and males, time of arrival or types of transport (see example d, Fig. 6.5) would be a trigger for you to ask some deeper questions about which females and males have access to what

Behaviour	10 min	20 min	30 min	40 min
Showing interest in meeting	~~1111~~ 11			
On task (e.g. notetaking)	11			
Off task, talking	~~1111~~			
Off task, enagaged in other activity	11			

Fig. 6.6 Observation table at 10-min intervals

forms of transport and how this influences their access to the clinic. At that stage, you might turn to a mapping method to determine where in the local area people are travelling from and what sorts of transport are available to them. And, later again, you may employ some interview techniques for an even richer picture. So, the table or checklist method is a simple way to collect surface data with a particular focus: that is, to learn a little about a lot.

When tabulating results for a behaviour, be aware that codes can be open to interpretation. Can you be sure you will code the same behaviour in the same way each time and for each participant? For example, say you are making some observations at a community meeting to determine the level of engagement of each member during small group discussions; you might develop a simple table to initiate your data gathering and use a snapshot method, or lapsed-time method, to create field texts. This would mean that you take down observations at 10-min intervals (see more on lapsed time below). This table gathers information about the number of members demonstrating the listed behaviour (Fig. 6.6):

Now imagine this. You see a member who is usually engaged in the meeting speaking to someone as an aside or writing on their notes. A classic error is to register that as involvement in the meeting, whereas a member who is often understood to be disengaged or troublesome might be seen as off task when enacting the very same behaviours. They may both have been talking about the latest DVD or doodling on their notes, but their behaviours are coded differently. Unless you hear exactly what they are saying, you could easily get the wrong picture about what is going on, compromising your knowledge proximity. And further, how will you judge if a member is 'interested' in the meeting topic? What behaviours would be evident if a participant was interested? The participant gazing out the window may be passionately interested and focuses their hearing by fixing their eye on the distance. The participant gazing at you in apparent awe may be replaying last night's computer game win in their head. Will a participant talking to their neighbour be coded as engaged or disruptive? Notice how easy it is to interpret rather than just observe. You need to work through these problems of clarity as your research progresses. Some complications like this will not become evident until you start gathering and reflecting on your data. This is to be expected, and you should not be trying to hide these realisations. Instead, you should be open about your discoveries of threats to the proximity of your knowledge. Being open and honest in this way is all part of demonstrating that you are a reflexive PA^{t}R^{er}.

Physical movement observation of inmates during recreation hour

Name: Eli Date: 14 Aug Session: 1

Minute Prisoner	15 sec A	30 sec B	45 sec C	60 sec D	average
	1	2	2	1	
2	2	3	3	3	
3	3	3	3	3	
4	3	1	2	2	
5	4	4	3	4	
6	4	3	4	4	
7	4	4	4	3	
8	4	3	3	3	
etc					
Total/average	2	3	1	1	

Coding

1	Stationary (lying, sitting)
2	Stationary with movement (eg standing with ball, using weights arms only)
3	Slow movement at leisurely pace (slow walking. hanging from fitness frame, leisurely shooting hoops)
4	Movement at medium pace (walking fast/ slow jogging/ walking up stairs/ continuous skipping/ climbing fitness frame/ cartwheels/ jumping on mini tramp)
5	Movement at a fast pace (running fast/ fast skipping/ jumping jacks/ aerobics)

Fig. 6.7 Checklist of physical movement of *inmates during recreation hour*

A checklist is a more developed type of table where behaviours, events, space use and so on can be recorded. One way to begin to construct a checklist is to do some preliminary work such as unstructured, open observations or discussions with other professionals, peers or colleagues, reference to your diary to see what behaviours, events, or space use occur often or are of interest. Based on this preliminary work, you can make a list of the things to observe and determine how these observations will be made. That is, do you record if the behaviour is present, or is it more appropriate to monitor whether there is a presence or absence of the behaviour so that two categories are needed. Again, the number and type of categories will be highly dependent on what is to be observed.

Lapsed-Time Sampling: The 'Snapshot' Method

A checklist can also be used to record systematic data observed using a snapshot approach. Depending on the type of field text you are creating and what behaviours you are intending to observe, the length of time you take to do these observations will be at your discretion. For example, if you wanted to know the level of activity of a prisoner engaged in their daily hour of exercise time, you might decide that a 15 second period per minute is enough. In this instance, you could monitor four prisoners in the one session. Prisoner A would be observed in the first 15 s, prisoner B in the 15–30-s time, prisoner C between 30 and 45 and prisoner D between 45 and 60. Again, there are limitations. Can you see what they are? To do this work, you would need a checklist something like Fig. 6.7.

In this case, the observer might set their watch so that it 'blips' every 15 s during the activity, provided the noise was not going to be distracting for the participants (otherwise, your data might show that every participant was off task all the time

because they stopped to look up and see what the noise was). Be careful that your research design does not interfere too much with the natural flow of the space you are observing. Upon hearing the noise, you only need to identify what your participant is doing. You may find you need an open option here with a mark such as '?' if it is not clear what result to record. When you are later looking over your data, you are then able to reflect on whether your instrument needs to be refined to include new categories for the behaviours that could not easily be recorded using the codes. This may involve adding new codes or changing the time periods of each observation. Trialling instruments, practising the use of instruments and refining them are all part of the continuous nature of good PA^{t}R.

Diaries

Diaries, logs and journals are typically the records that professionals keep throughout their work. These can be personal diaries that record your opinions on what is happening and may include a form of interpretation or analysis, or logs or journals that record actions by staff, patient records, meeting minutes and so forth. Other participants can also be encouraged to write in journals or diaries, but, depending on how the process is negotiated, access to their journals may or may not be possible. In many cases, diary writing by participants is a private and confidential matter between the professional and the student/patient/client, so it is not possible to use the diary as documentary evidence. You would need to make the purpose and audience of a diary clear with participants at the outset of the research. In many cases, it is feasible to have participants write specifically on topic for the project as part of the agreed field text construction.

As a last word on observation, depending on what you are trying to observe, it is important that you scan the literature for instruments that may already be available rather than you devising your own schedules and checklists and so on. Tried and tested tools not only give you ideas and save you reinventing the wheel but can act to warn you of the limitations, advantages and disadvantages *before* you use the instrument.

Surveys, Questionnaires and Other Pen and Paper Instruments

Rather than actually talking face to face, surveys, questionnaires and a range of pen and paper tests involve obtaining written information that adds richness to your data. Further, the data is gathered from the perspectives of the participants rather than the observer. Not only do these instruments provide an efficient, replicable, comparable and potentially reliable and valid way of creating field texts for the study, but they can also provide a general overview of the perspectives of participants as a group and a detailed view of the perspective of individuals over a range of topics. Surveys, questionnaires and so on are often easily administered and can be used several times throughout the study to look for changes in participant perspectives that might be teased out further via an interview, for example.

Rather than building your own surveys, researchers have often used validated instruments to seek information from participants. For example, Fraser (1998) described and reviewed nine major questionnaires for assessing student perceptions of classroom psychosocial environment. Many validated instruments are drawn from the psychology literature and often centre around constructs such as motivation (Goudas and Biddle 1994), meaninglessness (Chen 1998), ego or task orientation (Solmon 1996) or goal orientation (Walling and Duda 1995). There are several advantages in using such instruments:

- They are usually quick and easy to administer.
- A whole group can complete the instrument at the same time, thereby minimising disruption.
- They are validated, so they may have some credibility in the eyes of administrators, decision-makers and the research community.
- They are usually reasonably easy to interpret once the numbers are placed in a statistical package.
- They are anonymous, so participants may be more inclined to be honest.

Further, because they are validated, other studies using the same instruments may also be available for you to compare results with your project. The disadvantages of such instruments are that:

- Individual voices are lost in statistical procedures.
- The ready-made instrument may not include the issues the participants might consider important.
- Because of the anonymity, participants may not take the procedure seriously.
- Such instruments do not allow for interaction and follow-up questions.

If you do build your own survey, there are many considerations to take into account. For example, the questions themselves can be open, closed or use a category rating scale or a Likert (numerical rating) scale. In an extensive set of appendices, Kushman (1997, pp. 179–214) provides a variety of examples of fill-in-the-blank questions that were used in student-led research. The survey might look something like Fig. 6.8.

Closed questions can be answered with a simple yes/no or a tight range of defined options (e.g. often/sometimes/never). Category rating scales are used when some degree of inference must be made, that is, the participant or observer has to estimate a degree, frequency or quality of a particular behaviour or event. A category rating scale provides a list of options, somewhat like a multiple choice. For example, an activities facilitator at a rehabilitation ward or prison or in a community centre might be interested to know how interested participants were in the activities. The facilitator might ask the staff:

During the activities, the participants in your group:

1. Seemed interested throughout
2. Were interested in most of the activities
3. Had variable interest depending on the activity
4. Were only interested in a few of the activities
5. Had little or no interest in anything

1. In school (or in PE or in Maths …etc) I am usually...

-Happy because...
-Sad because…
-Angry because...
-Excited because...
-Bored because...

2. The best/worst thing that every happened to me at school (in this class) was...

3. To me a successful student in this class is...

4. If I were talking to students who were new at this school I would tell them that to be successful they need to...

Fig. 6.8 Survey of students in school

(a) during the activities, the participants in your group were interested throughout:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

Fig. 6.9 A Likert scale

If you would like more specific information, against each of these questions above, you could ask their level of agreement through the use of a Likert scale. A Likert is a numerical rating scale giving a range of options by degree (Fig. 6.9):

The questions themselves must also be carefully considered. What is the limitation in the following example?

What do you enjoy about evening meals at the youth centre (choose one):

1. Talking with friends
2. A good feed
3. Dessert

The respondent is forced into making a choice from limited options. What if what they like is not on the list? What if they liked (1) and (3) or what if the respondent did not like anything and wants to register what they did not like? Another form of question or another form of information gathering would be more suitable in this case.

What is wrong with this example?

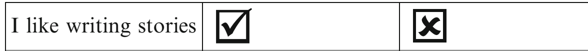

Fig. 6.10 Response sheet for participants with low textual literacy

I don't know why successful youth workers like Django Tolth and Serena Mills would commit suicide.

1. Agree
2. Not sure
3. Disagree

The question is double barrelled. I may well know why Django Tolth committed suicide but not Serena Mills and therefore might circle (1) and (3), making your instrument worthless in this case.

Ambiguities and inaccuracies may only become apparent in your administration of the instrument, so it is wise to test it out in a pilot run with a similar group of people first. You also have to consider the layout of a survey or questionnaire. This will be guided by the purpose of the research and on who your participants are. For those with low textual literacy, a pictorial scale may be suitable, together with talking through the questions one by one. You would have to be careful to not lead the participants in their answers. In the following example, you could ask them to circle the symbol that is their answer as you read the statement (Fig. 6.10).

Remember to consider the participants. If the instrument is too difficult to use or there are too many instructions or it is too long or tedious, the user will be less committed to completing it properly. They may not be as enthusiastic as you are on the topic, and you want to ensure their response has been a reaction to the information you are trying to find out, not a reaction to the poor quality of the instrument. You may want to consult to ensure that the instrument is culturally appropriate, and the instrument may also need to be modified to incorporate the particular language and literacy requirements of the local community. You will also need to ensure that participant responses can be clearly recorded so that there is no confusion in what the responses are. This may happen, for example, if the response options are very close together. Some of the computer survey tools, such as SurveyMonkey, have become very sophisticated and easy to create, administer, collect and summarise. They also have useful online tutorials to help you learn about their construction, but again, they are only as good as the questions being asked and their relevance to the users.

Interviews

Many researchers have found that while surveys or questionnaires can be useful, they may not facilitate in-depth information. Rarely will validated instruments allow participants to explain a certain response or question the response options themselves. More open-ended questionnaires encourage increased detail, but often,

participants are unwilling or unable to express themselves in any length or depth. Interviews, therefore, are a common alternative method used to seek participant views and create field texts. As with all instruments, the format will depend on the characteristics of the participants being interviewed and the purpose of the interview. Many researchers distinguish the types of interviews by the amount of structure used in the process (Chu 1993). Here, we consider interview structure in terms of:

- Composition
- Format
- Duration and timing

We also review:

- The interview schedule
- Conducting the interview
- Recording the interview
- How you might decide who it is you will interview, sometimes referred to as interview sampling

Structural Variations in Interviews

The structural elements of (1) composition, (2) format and (3) duration and timing must all be considered carefully.

1. *Composition*

Interviews can consist of:

- One-on-one, the interviewer and interviewee
- A small focus group, the interviewer with two participants or a small group of 3–6
- A large focus group interview that usually consists of six or more participants

There are advantages and disadvantages in each, so your choice will depend both on your purpose and your participants. For example, a small focus group interview may provide some security and safety for vulnerable participants – say newly arrived refugees in a community centre context or young LGBT people who do not want to be 'outed'. However, be aware that participants are subject to 'group think' in a focus group as it is interactively quite hard to disagree with a group and state an opposing or different view. You might, however, be interested in the dynamics of the group, how power plays out within such a group, so it is not only the answer content that might prove useful but also who gets to speak, when, and what happens as a result. To capture such dynamics, you might require the assistance of forms of recording that allow you to revisit such information, but we will talk more about this later. When managing a focus group, you also have to have quite a bit of skill to ensure that all participants get heard. In the best case, a dialogue can develop that

allows the interviewer to move from centre stage to a less focal position, allowing the participants themselves to explore an issue. Often, conversation prompts information that may not have been forthcoming in a one-on-one interview. A focus group is not just a gathering of individuals; the group is brought together around some focus, say, disadvantaged young people on the street who are dealing with homophobia, students in the class who say they love mathematics, case workers who declare great difficulty with time management or nurses who routinely experience harassment on the ward.

When considering individual or one-on-one interviews, there are several things to think about. The interviewees' sense of safety and security is foremost. Simply saying 'this is confidential you can trust me' may not alleviate the interviewees concerns. Your context will have ethics procedures around maintaining confidentiality and communicating that to participants (Chaps. 4 and 9), but your interviewee may still be untrusting for whatever reason. Consider too the nature of the information you are likely to hear. Sometimes, the individual interview is better for eliciting confidential and detailed information that a participant would be unwilling to share in a focus group. You can also use participants as interviewers (students interviewing each other, inmates interviewing each other, nurses and so on). They will need to be trained as interviewers and in the purpose of the interview. The advantage is that as they understand the language and nuances and may be better able to interpret ambiguous answers (Kushman 1997).

2. *Interview Format*

In addition to the composition of the interview, the structure of the questions will vary. *Structured* interviews involve the use of a specific set of questions delivered such that the interviewer does not deviate from the wording or sequence of questions, and the questions do not vary from one participant to the next, regardless of the responses. These types of interviews have explicit goals and are verbal approximations of a questionnaire (Fetterman 1998). This is a very formal approach and may or may not be practical and/or useful in your context. A structured interview can consist of both open and closed questions. The structured interview is often used to seek factual information, but it can also be used to delve into the participant's attitudes and behaviours.

The less formal, *semi-structured* and *unstructured* interviews tend to 'have an implicit agenda aimed at identifying shared values among certain groups' (Chu 1993, p. 3). Powney and Watts (1987) separated interviews depending on who 'controlled' the format: the interviewer or the informant. In an unstructured interview, the role of the interviewer is to assist the informant to articulate concerns and understandings. A semi-structured interview uses general questions. Instead of being an exactly worded and exactly ordered list to work through, the questions become something like a checklist of topics to address during the course of the interview. The sequence of questions for each person can be varied to keep the flow of discussion, and as an interviewer you can follow through on issues which may not have been anticipated by probing more about a response and going beyond the general questions to ask the research participant to talk more about a particular issue. The data collected from these types of interviews are somewhat more difficult

to classify as they can tend to produce very different responses from different people, and hence comparisons are not always possible or meaningful.

An unstructured interview (sometimes called *open* interview) is more like purposeful conversation. The researcher may have a broad opening statement and some loose questions to get the discussion underway and then work from the reactions and responses of the participant/s. This type of interview is useful in exploratory phases like the reconnaissance if there is no real sense of what might be the key issues or where there is not an already existing focus for the project. Conversely, once the researcher has a very good understanding of the research topic, the unstructured interview can be good approach for getting really rich and thick information.

The fourth type of interview, a *conversational* or *incidental* interview, might occur during normal activity on the research scene. Often, such conversations take place in relaxed, non-threatening and informal environments. Significant information can be revealed, or valuable insights uncovered, which would simply not happen in the formal setting of a more structured interview. However, there are important ethical dimensions to consider here. The information gained may be private and hence not available for use in the public domain. Consider whether the information is 'on the record' and whether revealing it may betray a trust or confidentiality or put someone at risk in some way. Unless the person or group with whom you are having the conversation knows and freely consents that anything they say can be used by you as data, you simply cannot use it. In all cases, you should check with the person to see whether or not you are free to write it in your report. If you cannot repeat the information from the conversation, then you can try to use your new knowledge to get the data in a more formal way, for example, with an interview or survey that is 'on the record'.

For further information about interview as a conversation, Denzin (1989) is a useful reference.

3. *Duration and Timing*

How long an interview should be will depend on a range of variables. These variables include the age, developmental appropriateness, verbal skills, motivation and attention span of the participants, the amount of time available to the researcher and the participant(s), and the willingness of the participant(s) to devote time to the task. For instance, a few researchers have conducted phenomenological in-depth interviews, consisting of three 60- to 90-min interviews over a 3-week period (e.g. Carlson 1995). The first interview begins with a life history to provide a context, the next concentrates on specific experiences and the last asks the participant to reflect on the meaning of these experiences (Seidman 1998). This type of interview is not designed to seek quantifiable answers, but rather seeks to understand the experiences of the participant. The intense interview (Brenner et al. 1985) and the long interview (Merton et al. 1990) are also intensive, in-depth forms of interviews. In some forms of research, the researcher 'lives alongside' the interviewee for many hours a week and weeks a year. A good example of a research team doing this, although not as an AR example, is in Clandinin et al. (2006). Each researcher was matched with a different participant and lived alongside them in the classroom for up to 18 months. Our experience suggests that some interviewees find long, intense

or 'alongside' interview structures are too daunting, but as the Clandinin et al. project shows, it is not impossible. You need to be clear with participants at the outset of a project. Participants need to know what time commitment your project is seeking from them so that they give consent with full knowledge of their commitment and its implications. Other researchers have used only one interview, while others still have used several interviews over time but of a shorter time span.

Consider also the timing of the interview. It may seem obvious, but you need to be aware of the participants' circumstances. For example, consider whether interviewing a nurse as she/he comes off a busy shift is good or poor timing. You may think it is good timing as you may capture the immediacy of their fatigue and frustrations, or you may consider it poor timing as your interview is aimed at gathering more thoughtful, considered and reflective responses. As always, it depends on what your aims are. Carpenter and emerald (2009), for example, sought the stories of mothers of children with ASD or ADHD. They deliberately created dedicated times and places for the women, so that they could relax, away from their children, and talk. They met in good coffee shops and allowed ample time (up to 3 h in some cases) at a timing convenient to the participants. In this way, they hoped to create the interview experience itself as pleasurable for the women, a rare moment of quiet and reflection in their tumultuous and busy lives. The interview times, places and spaces were seldom convenient for Carpenter and emerald. As a researcher, you may be called upon to put yourself to inconvenience in the name of the research.

The Interview Schedule

Your interview schedule is the list of questions you will ask. Some ethics procedures will require you to provide the list of questions to the interviewee before the interview. The success of your interview depends upon your preparation. Firstly, be clear about what it is you want to discuss, then consider how you will conduct the interview in order to focus on that information. The more structured the interview, the more carefully you need to consider your wording to ensure meaning is not ambiguous or leading. Depending on the level of structure, it may be necessary to develop either a comprehensive list of questions to be posed or a more open guide of questions. The questions should obtain the information needed, but it is useful to have follow-up and probing questions to encourage the interviewee to continue talking and to elicit more information, especially when the interviewee is unsure of what you are asking. Make sure your questions are:

1. Pertinent, that is, related to the research problem
2. Clear and unambiguous (edit out double-barrelled questions, double negatives and two-part questions)
3. Not leading or biased
4. Reasonable for this interviewee, that is, are they likely to know the answer
5. Not personally threatening or potentially embarrassing

Interview Conduct

To reduce a sense of imbalance in power relations between researcher and participant, some researchers opt for the semi-structured or open interview rather than structured interviews. Since the authenticity of participant experiences is central to the research, you must consider approaching the project with a ‘methodology for listening’ where you are concerned with ‘seeing the world from the perspective of our subjects’ (Glassner and Loughlin 1987, p. 37). In formal settings such as the interview, you might use ‘bland encouragement’ and ‘low-inference paraphrasing’ with some ‘nonleading leads’ (Carspecken 1996, pp. 159–160). Being mindful of reciprocity (de Laine 2000; Gallagher 1995; Lather 1986; Lincoln 1997), you might also ask participants what *they* might require from their participation in return for their involvement. This is particularly important if they were not involved in the initial planning of the project where they could have expressed their needs and issues to be addressed. You may be surprised by your interviewees needs. As a case in point, in interviews conducted for the project reported in Carpenter and emerald (2009), interviewees routinely voiced their appreciation that the interview gave them a rare chance to be heard. For these interviewees, that was a pivotal and fulsome reason enough to be involved.

Once the interview has been transcribed, some researchers also return a printed copy to participants to seek their clarification and give them opportunity to change what they said if they feel they had not represented their answer in the way they had meant. While this ‘member check’ may show ethical sensitivities, debates over meaning-making and increased work for the researcher and participant may mean you do not use this option. Your decisions should always be driven by respect for your participant’s wishes and a clear sense of why or why not this option would be offered. To aid your use of interviews, we offer the following guidelines:

- Take a little time to get to know the interviewee(s) before the interview process, even if it is just a few minutes of informal chat before the interview starts.
- Make sure your interviewees feel safe and confident with you; the development of a friendly environment is necessary for obtaining useful and valuable data.
- Use active listening techniques.
- Monitor your own body language – generally speaking, use eye contact (but not in a way that is threatening nor in a culturally inappropriate way), lean forward, don’t cross your arms or legs and nod your head.
- Monitor your behaviour and your feedback, for example, are you leading the interviewee in your responses to their responses. More often than not, participants are keen for the interview to be successful. As such, they will monitor your responses to see if they are providing the information you need. In this way, your responses can end up determining what they say.
- In a focus group context, do not single out individual participants; spread your attention amongst the focus group, and ensure each member has the opportunity to speak. Be very careful not to single out participants in a confrontational or threatening way.

- Find a quiet, nonpublic area where you are not likely to be interrupted (this may not be very easy in places like hospitals and schools) but also ensure it is a visible space where others can observe your actions, especially when working with minors. In the instance of working with minors, Fine and Sandstrom (1988), McLeod and Malone (2000), Fraser et al. (2004), and Lewis and Kellett (2003) provide guidelines including those related to safety and surveillance.
- Explore the language of the participant, for example, Ennis (1999), found students using the word 'sorry' to describe their classmates in a very particular way; it was only with probing that the meaning became clear to the interviewer.
- Do not argue with your interviewee – it is not about you!
- Share a little about yourself if you are asked a question or if you think the interviewee might expect a two-way sharing relationship – but do not make it about you.
- And a mistake many first-time interviewers make – listen – do not talk. Keep questions as concise and clear as possible. Long rambling examples or explanations usually do not help. If the interviewee asks for clarification, then clarify, but keep the initial question as succinct as possible.

Consider audio taping an interview (with the participant's approval) for the specific purpose of reviewing and monitoring your own performance as an interviewer. We can pretty much guarantee that you will be surprised by what you hear.

Recording Interview Responses

Depending on the type of information needed, the depth of analysis to be undertaken and the note-taking abilities of the researcher, the method of recording information is largely a matter of your choice. Human memory is notoriously inefficient, and you will generally need to have a more systematic approach to keeping an account of what was discussed. There are several possibilities open to you:

- Make notes immediately after the interview.
- During the interview, make very brief jottings to serve as a catalyst to remember what was said for each interview question, and expand these notes as soon as possible after the interview.
- Have a scribe who is able to note take quickly and accurately while you focus on the interview.
- Audio record the interview: You will then need to consider whether you need to make a word-for-word transcription from the recording or a summary of responses with some verbatim quotes. Be aware that transcribing is a very time-consuming procedure, each hour of interview can take 5–8 h of transcribing depending on your keyboard skills and the detail you need in your transcription. Computer-assisted transcription programmes are becoming more efficient and effective. If a very fine-grained analysis of your interview is called for, a verbatim transcript

may be necessary. If you do choose to audio record, be aware that your interviewee may be distracted or threatened by the recorder, and this may impact what they are willing to say. When using a recorder, it is etiquette to check with the participant if they approve of its use prior to commencing the interview.
- Video record the interview: This allows you to capture expression and body language, which will help you to interpret silences. As long as your participant agrees and does not 'freeze' when on camera, this may be an option for your project, but again, there are ethical and consent issues to which you will need to respond.

Sampling

A key decision to be made is who to interview. In some cases, it might only be a small number of the overall group, whereas in other cases, it may need to be the whole group. Again, the purpose of the research will determine the sample size. The larger the group involved in the project, the more important it is to decide who to interview, as it is not always possible (or desirable) to interview everyone. Ask yourself: Do I need to interview everyone or just some key individuals? How will I decide who those key individuals will be? Who will I be leaving out, that is, whose voice will not be heard? When deciding who to interview, think in terms of not only who key individuals might be but who they represent, for example, wardspeople, union representatives, nurses, doctors, ambulance drivers and surgeons.

Stories/Narrative Inquiry

Another field text construction technique is to use narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry uses stories to describe human experiences and action. There are many ways to collect stories, including for learning about and exploring social justice issues (Stone-Mediatore 2003). It may involve asking participants to write or tell the story of their experience or asking an individual or group to construct a fictionalised story of their experience. Brenton Prosser did this in his book *Seeing Red* (2006). One chapter is a story written by a group of boys with ADHD, describing life with ADHD from the perspective of a fictional boy. The group drew on their combined experience to create this story. Zoe Dawkins (2008) used Photovoice to hand over control of the research process to the unemployed youth in Vietnam while Sonja Vivienne (2010) used short videos constructed by participants to tell their story of intersex marginalisation and a siblings' response to same-sex surrogacy. Stories, either biographical or fictionalised, written or spoken, text or visual, can be a useful way to capture how participants interpret the meanings of life experiences. In an explicitly action research framework, drawing on the fundamentally relational nature of both narrative inquiry and action research, Vera Caine (2010) used visual

narrative inquiry to explore understandings of 'community' as a relational and lived experience. Children created what Caine called 'visual narrative composites' using photographs, pictures and words. The visual narrative process positioned the students as both research collaborators and participants. The reflective process enabled self-expression and active collaboration.

Narrative inquirers notice that stories can demonstrate whose voices are heard and whose are silenced, whose histories are valued and whose are devalued, what meanings are represented as standard and what meanings are obscured and resisted (McAllister 2001). Narrative inquiry is a developing method. It provides deep insight into the beliefs and perceptions of participants.

The field texts of a narrative inquirer might include written stories, spoken stories, interviews, photographs and other visual storytelling means. Chapter 7 examines in some depth both the collection and analysis of stories within the narrative inquiry framework.

Critical Incidents

An incident, an event, a situation, an interaction or an occurrence that captures our attention, or is regarded as significant, can be thought of as a *critical* incident. We may choose to focus on a particular event or situation because it stands out, for example, an accident or some sort of crisis or disaster (perhaps something that has not happened to us before). Thus, as a problem or a challenge that needs to be addressed, a critical incident is an important source of data. However, many critical incidents are not particularly obvious. Rather they are:

> mostly straightforward accounts of very commonplace events that occur in routine professional practice which are critical in the rather different sense that they are indicative of underlying trends, motives and structures. These incidents appear to be 'typical' rather than 'critical' at first sight, but are rendered critical through analysis. (Tripp 1993, pp. 24–25)

It is worth dwelling for a moment on Tripp's distinction here between critical incidents that seem 'typical' and those that are indeed 'critical'. A typical incident may be rendered 'critical' through the analytic act of *critique*. To help us understand this distinction, Tripp (1996) is worth citing at length:

> the main difference is between those that jump out at us as critical because they're disastrous and dramatic, and those that we make critical by critiquing them. It's the difference between a roof collapsing or a student being violent with a teacher, and a school giving two music prizes, one for the boys and one for the girls. Most of us would see an incident in which the roof collapsed or a pupil swore at us and overturned a table as critical, and we'd do so because they are contrary to our ideas of safety and how pupils should behave. But that's just our perception—if we expected roofs to collapse and thought such pupil behaviour was O.K. and it happened every day, we would see them as annoying rather than 'critical', and indeed, some teachers do see students swearing at them as commonplace. (pp. 1–2)

So Tripp is asking us to notice that there are two sorts of critical incidents: (1) critical incidents that are critical in and of themselves (but he urges us to still be

aware that it is our construction of the world 'as it should be' that makes events 'critical') and (2) critical incidents that are 'made' critical through our critique of them. Without our critique, they may have passed unnoticed as they are so routine and commonsense to us that we fail to question them in our usual world, like the awarding of music prizes according to gender, thereby enacting a theory that gender has some impact on musicality.

To keep track of incidents that you think may be 'critical' and to develop your ideas, we recommend the use of what Tripp (1993) refers to as 'a critical incident file' (p. 68). This will be a specific page in your ongoing field notes or research journal, or you may simply mark certain field notes to denote your researcher hunch of this as an event that you will want to analytically revisit with the research team. Depending upon the type or significance of the event or incident, you may not have much time to write or think about what is happening. So, a critical incident file can help you to keep track of any behaviours, activities, events or incidents that come to your attention as well as your initial impressions and reflections. In this way, a critical incident file is both an important exploratory and interpretive tool that allows you to collate information and to identify potential themes for more extensive analysis at a later date (Tripp 1993). Finally, it may be useful for your research to have all participants keep their own personal critical incident files so that you are able to gather a rich source of 'insider' data and pool ideas about any incidents or events.

An example of using critical incidents to create a field text is provided in the LEAP vignette (Chap. 10). In Chap. 7, we describe how to analyse a critical incident within the bounds of an ideology critique. This is an endeavour that is not always easy, and you will see it at work in Chap. 10.

Documents as Data

The final form of field text construction that we focus on involves the collection of documents. This is perhaps the least intrusive form of creating field texts. Pertinent documents will vary according to the context but may include:

- Policy documents (the ward's policy on sharps disposal, the community group's policy on employment, the school's behaviour management plan)
- Work samples (copies of school students' work, photographs or copies of work samples from the occupational therapy session)
- Newsletters
- Letters
- Examinations
- Other forms of records such as data archives

It may also extend to non-written documents such as websites, web pages, films, television programmes, photographs and drawings. Robson (2002) distinguishes between two forms of evidence in documents, 'witting evidence is that which the author intended to impart', while everything else gleaned from the document is

'unwitting evidence' (p. 351). It is therefore important that you realise the purpose of your document collection as there is often not a problem finding documents, rather a problem deciding which to keep. To avoid enormous files that will never be used, ask yourself always 'what counts' and 'why' would I collect these documents. A key when collecting documents is to consider what use will they be in understanding your research question. And file and date documents in some useful and retrievable fashion.

An Important Note to You as a Researcher

As a researcher, you may be trusted with sensitive information. There are some important things to consider. You are likely to be behoven to mandatory reporting laws, that is, you are required by law to report certain things to the appropriate authorities, for example, if a person reveals they are at threat of harm or are causing harm to another person. This can be very stressful. So, before you set out, find out what the rules are in your institution and in your community and what support is available to you. Further, when introducing your research to an interview participant, you will be wise to say that this interview is confidential except as required by mandatory reporting laws. They know then, that if they reveal, for example, that they are ongoing victim of domestic violence or they have committed a crime, you are by law required to report that to the appropriate authorities.

Consider also the effect on you. You may be hearing distressing stories. These pop up in some unlikely places, for example, you may be talking to a child in your class about literacy and hear a very distressing story about an incident in their life. If necessary, you then must negotiate the stressful context of mandatory reporting (replete with sensitive issues around holding the trust of your participant) *and* shoulder the emotional and psychic impact of both the story and the reporting process. Many stories you hear will not require mandatory reporting of course but may still leave you tired and overwhelmed. For example, emerald and Carpenter found that in the course of their research, they heard over and again stories of hardship, stress, ceaseless toil, loneliness and desperation from mothers raising children with disability (Austin and Carpenter 2008; Carpenter and Austin 2007, 2008). As researchers, they turned often to the supportive mechanisms within the research team and beyond to manage the emotional and psychic impact. You must have a debriefing mechanism in place, whether it is your supervisor at work, a counsellor or another colleague.

Over and again and at any time in your PA^{t}R, check on your application of the key points of doing PA^{t}R type work. That is, check that your theoretical and philosophical orientations influence how you do the research:

- Is it participatory and collaborative?
- Is it focused on change and improvement?
- Does it develop and include a self-critical community?

- Does it embody praxis? That is, critically informed, committed action, action informed by literature and theories beyond that of the group. This also includes the group theorising their own practice throughout the data collection and testing their own assumptions.
- Is it explicitly political in nature? This final point is sometimes ignored by research, but it is upfront in PA^tR.

In summary, this chapter has been about constructing field texts. We say 'construction' rather than 'collection' to be upfront about the choices that are made in methodology, choices that are often hidden in research described as 'objective' or 'positivist' or in research that does not make its politics explicit.

In the next chapter, we focus on the construction of research texts, the process often referred to as data analysis.

Guiding/Clarifying Questions

1. Other than systematic observation and survey, describe three methods of producing field texts.
2. What might be the contextual factors that inform your decision to use each?
3. What aspects of an observation would reflect a PA^tR project rather than a positivist project?
4. How would you differentiate between a survey that was PA^tR and one that was positivist?

Extending Your Reading

For in-depth method texts, refer to the SAGE series of methodology handbooks. The following list is a selection of books that cover many aspects of field text construction. Be selective, considering those that might most suit your context.

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O'Leary, Z. (2005). *Researching real-world problems: A guide to methods of inquiry*. London: Sage Publications.
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Prosser, B. (2006). *Seeing red: Critical narratives in ADHD research*. Teneriffe: Post Pressed.
Robson, C. (2002). *Real world research: A resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers*. Oxford/Madden: Blackwell Publishers.
Schostak, J. F. (2006). *Interviewing and representation in qualitative research*. Maidenhead/New York: Open University Press.
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Stewart, A. (1998). *The ethnographer's method*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
Thyer, B. (Ed.). (2001). *The handbook of social work research methods*. London: SAGE.
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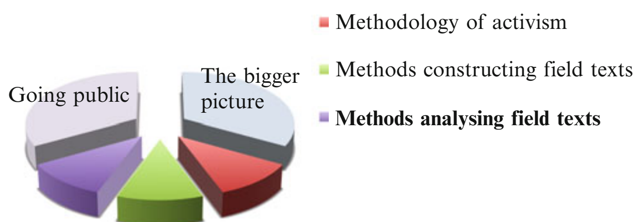
Chapter 7
Methods of Analysing Field Texts to Construct Research Texts

Section B: Doing this stuff



Systematic and rigorous construction of field texts is pivotal in good empirical research. The previous chapter discussed some of the forms of field texts you might create in a PA^{t}R. Whatever methods are used, there is an equally important 'next phase' to the process to help you make sense of what is going on: the analysis of field texts to create research texts. Research texts (Clandinin and Connelly 2000) are the texts produced through the analysis of field texts. Thinking about the analysis is part of the planning phase. Analysis allows you to explore, interpret and make sense of the field texts or data. There are powerful qualitative and quantitative computer software that can enhance your analysis, for example, NVivo (qualitative) and SPSS (quantitative). However, like all tools, you need to know how to use them effectively, and training in these packages is beyond the scope of this book, so we refer you to the many guides available should you want to employ such software.

It is worth reiterating here that ideally, PA^{t}R enacts a move away from the 'cult of expertise' that reproduces unequal relationships between the researcher and the researched in traditional approaches (Lather 1986, p. 73). That is, it is important within PA^{t}R to examine carefully and critically (critique-ally) how we engage with all aspects of the research process including engaging *the participants* in all aspects of the research process from planning, to implementation, and reporting in ways

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DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4426-4_7, © Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2013

that are meaningful and empowering. This can mean, for example, providing the participants with opportunities to learn about and generate the methods they are using. This might entail setting aside time for participants to learn about and experiment with the methods for generating field texts and research texts. Engaging participants in this way values them as 'holders of knowledge' (Fox et al. 2010, p. 22) and empowers them to act upon their situation, rather than having to rely upon the expert researcher.

Clearly, it is not always possible to involve participants fully at every turn, and sometimes participants themselves do not desire this level of engagement, but it is an ideal to keep in mind. For one reason or another, few action research projects have the full involvement of all the participants at all the different stages of the research process. Often, as Dick (2002) observes, the scope of involvement within action research will run the full continuum from the barest contact to a setting where participants or the members of a community will be committed to doing the research for themselves with little or no assistance. Regardless, the level of involvement of participation is something that will have to be constantly negotiated with sensitivity to issues of power. Keep in mind also that there is always an element of trial and error as part of the PA^{t}R process; outcomes can be unpredictable. Research that is a shared process of respectful listening, learning, support and growth will entail this element of 'learning by doing' (O'Brien 2001).

So, we are not suggesting that there is only one way of doing PA^{t}R, or it is not worth doing at all. We do suggest, however, that it is important to take into consideration the ability and desire of participants to engage fully and meaningfully with PA^{t}R as such efforts can build the democratic capacity of a research collective in ways that are meaningful, powerful, and sustained (Fox et al. 2010). Certainly, a number of books, articles and websites can provide guidance and support on how to engage participants in developing experience and capacity with activist research methods, for example, The Free Child Project (http://www.freechild.org/PAR.htm). Although you may be constrained by time and opportunity, the point here is to try not to be complicit in reproducing a history of dispossession, othering and marginalisation through the very methods that you use.

In this chapter, to get you started, we outline five methods that can be used manually or with software. These are introduced firstly by an approach referred to as critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA, in its critical nature, reflects many of the principles of PA^{t}R. Other methods may or may not in their very nature reflect PA^{t}R, so you must explicitly adopt a critical orientation when using these methods with a PA^{t}R framework. The chapter then goes on to explore some of these methods in more detail including critical incident analysis and ideology critique, narrative analysis, thematic analysis, content analysis and descriptive statistical analysis. The section on 'Narrative Analysis' is extended, providing an example of a method that can be mobilised within PA^{t}R.

Certain forms of field texts lend themselves to certain forms of analysis and therefore construction of research texts (in Chaps. 4, 5 and 6, we discussed

how your field texts will be guided by your questions and your philosophical orientations). For example, surveys can lend themselves to descriptive statistics, while document collection would be suited to a content analysis. The following entrée into forms of analysis acts only as an entry point, and we strongly recommend that once you grasp the array of methods provided in this chapter and their implications for your work, you read more extensively about the methods you choose to use for your project.

Critical Discourse Analysis

PA^{t}R takes power, knowledge, action and language as focal and as linked. One family of analysis that pays particular attention to these is critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA is an overarching method that has emerged from social and linguistic theory. While there is not just one method or definition employed by those using CDA, there are common elements in that all CDA analyses how power plays out in:

- Written or spoken texts
- The discourse or processes of text production, distribution and consumption
- Processes embedded in everyday practices

CDA is used to investigate the power relations and ideologies involved in knowledge and the practice of such knowledge. CDA employs a range of methods to explore how oppression, inequality and violence are carried out in the language and practices of the individual (micro-level), of groups and society (meso- and macro-levels). With this in mind, many of the methods below systematically and rigorously sift through field texts to identify where, by whom, to whom and how power is used. The methods here look not only to the specific structures of words but also look within the structures of society. Such societal structures might include the organisation of institutions, promoted and absent knowledge systems, acceptable and unacceptable social relations, and available and unavailable ways of being. You might be beginning to see how ontology and epistemology are again as vital to methods of analysis as they are to the questions you ask! As you work through each of the methods of analysis below, keep in mind CDA as your overarching intention as well as an overarching structure, working at the three levels of micro, meso and macro simultaneously. In practice, this entails working in a detailed and fine-grained way while also standing back to look at how the bigger picture (macro-level) relates to this detail (micro-level). For example, Austin et al. (2003) examine the minutiae of classroom talk to demonstrate the micro-level playing out of the macro social structures of the social organisation of power in schooling. We have made this micro-macro link quite explicit in the section on narrative analysis, but you may well see the links with others.

Critical Incidents, Critiquing Incidents and Ideology Critique

In Chap. 6, we introduced you to the idea of collecting a record of critical incidents that you witness or experience in your professional context. Your critical incident file is your field text. Here, we look at a way of analysing that file within the context of an *Ideology Critique.*

Against the backdrop of the linguistic turn and postmodernism, criticism of ideology has largely fallen out of fashion and out of use (Žižek 1993). Ideology critique has its origins in Marxism and is a term commonly associated with the Frankfurt School of critical theory including the German theorist Jürgen Habermas mentioned in Chap. 3 (Cohen et al. 2007). Ideology critique's focus on the negative aspects of ideology or what is often referred to as the 'dominant ideology' including the role it plays in legitimating the status quo has been viewed as problematic, to put it mildly. Countering these criticisms and others, the Slovenian philosopher Žižek (1993) argues that as a form of praxis, criticism of ideology has a profoundly positive role in the imaginative reconstruction of society.

For our purposes, ideology is defined here as the totality of shared ideas, values, attitudes and beliefs in society and the way in which these are informed by competing sets of interests, either implicitly or explicitly. Ideologies are acquired and enacted at the level of the everyday through different sayings, doings and relatings (Schatzki 2002). Žižek (1994) defines ideology as '… the generative matrix that regulates the relationship between visible and non-visible, between imaginable and non-imaginable, as well as the changes in this relationship' (p. 1). However, in terms of the way in which ideology can impact on professional judgement, Tripp (1996) defines it in more understandable and concrete terms:

> … it has to do with the way in which certain ideas represent the world to us and make us think and behave in certain ways. Many of those ideas are quite explicitly and consciously subscribed to, but are nevertheless pervasive and persuasive. (p. 55)

As an example, at a particular point in history the idea that the world was flat reduced world exploration.

We suggest then that ideology critique is a valuable method for understanding and intervening in relationships of power. Relationships of power are often both unspoken and unseen, and therefore usually left unproblematised and unchallenged. Given the pervasive and often latent or hidden tendencies of ideology, ideology critique exposes how ideology operates. Drawing on the work of Guess (1981), Cohen et al. (2007) explain that it is:

> the working out of vested interests under the mantle of the general good. The task of ideology critique is to uncover the vested interests at work which may be occurring consciously or subliminally, revealing to participants how they may be acting to perpetuate a system which keeps them either empowered or disempowered. (p. 28)

With this agenda in mind, a key question is, 'Who benefits?'

Yet, the claim that some deeper or hidden truth can be unveiled or revealed through ideology critique is often considered to constitute little more than political posturing that is somewhat well-meant but ultimately elitist and paternalistic. For example, the analytic conclusion that people are just the passive dupes of powerful

interests in society has been criticised as both misguided and patronising (Blackburn 2000). Regardless of good intent, critics, including philosophers associated with postmodernism and post-structuralism such as Foucault (1991), argue that such an analysis fails to consider the complex and often subtle ways in which power operates through such things as discourse and language. Worse still, a major weakness of ideology critique is that it allegedly denies the subjects of inquiry, who are identified as suffering from oppression or 'false consciousness', the validity of their lived experience and the right to tell their own stories (Martin 2007). To deny voice and validity in this way is an extraordinarily disempowering conclusion for the very people you are hoping to 'help'.

Notwithstanding potential shortcomings, we suggest that ideology critique is a powerful method that allows researchers to displace and denaturalise ideas, relations and practices typically presented as natural, normal or commonsensical (see also Kellner 1997; Žižek 1993, 1994). The task of the researcher is to make the operation of ideology visible or transparent and thus available for comment and critique. In the action research literature, David Tripp (1998) describes ideology critique as '… an analysis and critical evaluation of assumptions, rationales and actual practices' (p. 43). No matter the research context, Cohen et al. (2007) argue this critical evaluation entails acknowledging that within the often unconscious and habitual of everyday organisational life, 'Situations are not natural but problematic (Carr and Kemmis 1986). They are the outcomes or processes wherein interests and powers are protected and suppressed, and one task of ideology critique is to expose this' (p. 28).

What we want to emphasise is that ideology critique is not simply a form of rhetorical critique or analysis achieved through the unilateral or arbitrary imposition of abstract concepts or meanings by an outside observer. Within PA[t]R, the theoretical basis for participatory analysis, including the meanings of ideas, practices, cultural artefacts or other forms of communication, should never be taken as pre-given, absolute or clear-cut. Within the context of critical theory, including First Nations and decolonial perspectives or standpoints, the basis for understanding a situation through methods such as ideological critique should be discussed openly and constructively (Denzin et al. 2008). Ideally, this would provide the groundwork for critical dialogue and problem-posing through which participants become active agents within their own context, enabling them to respond creatively and concretely within their unique circumstances.

As mentioned in Chaps. 3 and 5, the focus on empowering participants through research is closely aligned with Freire's (1985) belief that it is important to break the 'culture of silence' that characterises contexts of inequality (p. 73). For Freire, the culture of silence is a problem that tends to bedevil most kinds of reform or change as it is sanctioned and fuelled by institutions and cultural traditions that are threatened by a loss of power. As we noted earlier, Freire (1993) argues that the culture of silence prevents people from developing the means and the right 'to *name* the world, to change it' (p. 69). Ideology critique is, at a fundamental level, about 'unsilencing'.

So, how does an ideology critique get started in a practical way? Let us first get a sense of a *critique* and then develop that critique further within *ideology* critique. We suggest that you just dive in by choosing an incident from your critical incident

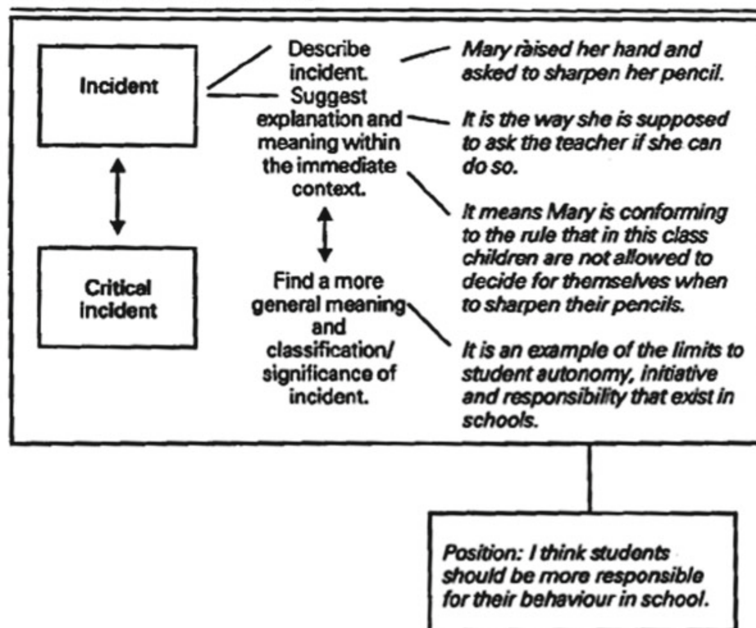

Fig. 7.1 Creating a critical incident from David Tripp (1993, p. 26)

file that captures your researcher interest. From a practical perspective, anything from a typical or commonplace event, situation, interaction or occurrence that captures your attention, or is regarded as significant, can be thought of as a critical incident. For Tripp (1993), producing a *critiqued* incident (i.e. analysing a critical incident) is comprised of two stages. The first stage is a description of some observed phenomenon. This is the process that produces a description of the incident in terms of 'what' and 'why'. The second stage entails moving beyond the description and 'seeing the incident as an example of a category in a wider, usually social, context' (p. 25). Tripp (1993) provides a simple example of an observed incident in a classroom setting:

> Mary raised her right hand. After about a minute her teacher noticed, and asked her what she wanted. Mary asked if she could sharpen her pencil. (p. 25)

Here, we have a description of an observed incident. Indeed, your initial impression may be that it is quite easy to ascertain what happened during this incident – and that it does not warrant further analysis. Yet, Tripp (1996) demonstrates how this incident could be made *critical* when looking at it more closely through analysis, by linking what happened to something of significance in the wider context. He illustrates how this is achieved in Fig. 7.1.

What appears to be a fairly straightforward incident is revealed to be much more complex.

Tripp (1993) demonstrates also how to develop your critical incident analysis as an ideology critique. He identifies four sequential steps or stages of development for the purposes of ideology critique:

(a) Describe the phenomenon, and attribute meaning and significance to it in terms of the accepted (dominant) view.
(b) Analyse and examine that view for internal consistencies, paradoxes, contradictions and counter-instances, including what is being omitted from the viewpoint, the structured silences and absences.
(c) Look for reasons to explain why the dominant view (a) ignored or excluded what you found in (b); attribute agency, and suggest whose interests are best served by (a), and who is most disadvantaged by (b).
(d) Search for an existing or create a new alternative structure which is more rational and socially just than (a) by utilizing what you found in (b) and (c) (p. 59).

Gregory demonstrates this method in use in Chap. 10.

As Gregory's 'warts and all' account of the LEAP project in Chap. 10 demonstrates, ideology critique is much easier said than done. This is particularly so given that as a socially critical researcher you want to ensure that participants are treated with integrity, not simply mined for data, nor turned into victims or exposed to harm. In Gregory's account, you will see how that endeavour is often complicated and does not always provide easy solutions in practice! Remember, there is no one correct way (or interpretation) and we suggest that the best way forward is to practice, experiment and refine or adjust different approaches with respect to your local context.

In this section, we have drawn extensively from Tripp's (1993) book *Critical Incidents in Teaching*. As the title suggests, the book provides a wealth of detailed information on critical incidents and ideology critique with the use of concrete examples from the field of education. But examples from your own context could be easily identified, for example, the social worker who sits behind a desk with framed degree and credentials hanging on the wall when interviewing clients, the university professor who expects a female colleague to perform a variety of stereotypical gender roles such as taking notes at departmental meetings, or the manager who routinely ignores or even denies complaints and instead constructs those who raise them as not being 'team players'. Remember not to downplay or even dismiss incidents that appear on the surface to be trivial, typical or unremarkable. Jot them in your critical incident file so that you revisit them later. As your research in this context develops and your researcher expertise develops, you will become more attuned to both critical incidents and critique-ing these incidents.

Narrative Analysis, Textual Analysis and Thematic Analysis

While these three forms of analysis are different to each other, they are related and often used in conjunction with each other. They might be thought of as being part of the rich and varied suite that has come to be understood as *narrative inquiry*.

Narrative inquiry recognises that narrative is a powerful way of knowing, 'as powerful as scientific knowing but different from it' (Bruner 1986, p. viii). The term narrative inquiry can be variously used to describe:

- The method of data gathering (field text construction, i.e. gathering participants stories, through interview, video, visual forms and so on, as described in Chap. 6)
- The method of analysis (research text construction)
- The form of representation (using a story to communicate the research findings, as described in Chap. 6)

In this chapter, we focus on narrative analysis, that is, research text construction and methods of understanding within the narrative tradition. However, within this field, even the use of the term *narrative* varies. Reissman and Speedy (2007) warn their readers 'not to expect a simple, clear definition of narrative that can cover all applications' (p. 428). Hence, in this rich field, there are several ways to approach analysis. A common thread of all these analytic approaches is to seek the meanings as produced in the story, which includes:

- The meanings represented as standard
- The truisms sustained
- The meanings obscured and resisted
- The voices from the margins
- The silences (see McAllister 2001)

Narrative Analysis

As we noted, this is a rich and varied field. Given that in this book we aim to introduce you to some methods of research text construction (analysis) that you could pursue in your own research, we will just skim the surface of this rich field by limiting our outline to just a few approaches to narrative inquiry and narrative analysis as taken up by Bamberg (2004), Clandinin and Connelly (2000), and Carpenter and emerald (2009). As this chapter is aimed at demonstrating methods, we will outline in some detail an example of a narrative analysis that incorporates thematic analysis (Carpenter and emerald 2009).

To broadly characterise the approaches to narrative inquiry and analysis we outline here, we could say that Bamberg's approach is a detailed textual approach, Clandinin's aims to understand the lifeworld of participants and Carpenter and emerald span these approaches by making an analysis of participants' stories to understand how they relate to the broader social world.

Clandinin and Rosiek (2007, p. 41) state 'narrative inquiries explore the stories people live and tell'. Importantly, narrative inquiry adds legitimacy to both the stories told and the stories lived. Note how *tell* and *live* are not conflated here. This move creates a space for the stories and the lives to be in relationship. Narrative inquiry, then, is often about understanding that relationship. Narrative inquiry

understands the stories people tell to be a *representation* of the lived experience and looks to how that representation emerges from what Clandinin and Rosiek refer to as a 'stream of experience' (2007, p. 40). As such, Clandinin and colleagues' narrative analyses are typically rich and detailed accounts of the scene of interest, at times entailing extended and extensive field text construction and rich, detailed and extended accounts of the research site. Take, for example, the research reported in the book *Composing Diverse Identities* (Clandinin et al. 2006). The research team did not shy away from the enormity and complexity of their goal, which was to 'understand diverse individual's experience as they lived out in dynamic relation to people, places and things, in and outside of school' (p. 2). As such, the seven-member research team lived alongside teachers, students, administrators and families for 18 months. In aiming to make sense of these lives in this way, their report has a particular depth and layering.

Bamberg (2004) articulates three approaches to narrative inquiry: psychoanalytic, phenomenological and discursive. In brief, the psychoanalytic approaches seek access to a truth behind the story, or a deeper truth, perhaps not known the teller of the story. Psychoanalytic approaches search for the internal motivations of the storyteller and seek the conflict at the core of the story. Phenomenological approaches seek an in-depth understanding in pursuit of the essence of experience and so are interested in fine-grained descriptions. Bamberg himself works within the discursive approach which recognises that the story and the *telling* of the story are in relationship. The story is remade in the telling, the telling creates another possible truth. Hence, the discursive approach pays attention to the telling as much as the story. When working with field texts Bamberg suggests that you can work with the data in terms of the elements of:

- Form
- Content
- Function

If analysing the field text with a focus on form, you would consider the internal structures of language and identify the genres being used. Genres are groups of narratives that hang together in more or less prototypical structures such as found in the love story genre, birth-giving stories and victim-blaming stories, for example. You might find, for example, that your participants often call on a particular form of story when describing their experience, say, overcoming adversity stories, or hope from tragedy stories.

Analysing for content focuses on what the story is about. So you would consider what topics or themes are included in the field text. You might do this through thematic analysis (explored below). For example, the theme of the pressures of change and staff reductions might recur in interviews with nursing staff, or the theme of economic rationalism might recur throughout policy documents.

An analysis of function investigates what the storytelling achieves in a communicative or interactional sense, both in terms of the identity of the storyteller and the relation of the teller and audience. So, for example, a participant might frame her stories to position herself as victim, or hero, or innocent bystander, hence constructing

a particular identity. In terms of the interaction between the teller and the listener, the effect of the participant's story might be to test a friendship, establish a bond or shock the interviewer. If the field texts are co-constructed through interviews, that is, between the interviewer and the interviewee, you need to be cognizant of not just the function of the content of the interview but also what is being done for the relationship between the two people. For example, it is not uncommon in our experience for interviewees to conclude an interview with something like 'did you get what you need?' or 'did I say the right thing?' This reveals that interviewees often have an awareness of the purpose or function of their participation and their orientation to fulfilling that purpose will, of course, influence their responses.

Bamberg (2004) suggests that each of these analyses of the elements (form, content and function) can be put to work in terms of three levels of *positioning analysis:*

Level 1 – The Characters in a Story World: This level examines just the story world. It is at the level of textual analysis (form) and might encompass: text-linguistics, stylistics (e.g. rhetorical devices) and narrative form (including such elements as narrative clauses, event structure, evaluative clauses, stepping out of the plot line, overall narrative structure). This analysis examines the characters in the story world and their positioning vis-à-vis one another using detailed textual analysis. An example might be the way that characters are differentially named (with their real name) or described (and not named) in the opening pages of the novel *The Lord of the Flies*, and the way this textual choice positions the characters within the story. When we interview participants, they often tell stories to make a point. In your PA^{t}R project then, this detailed form of analysis might examine how power relations are evident in the naming (and non-naming) of characters in your interviewees 'story', for example, a young person's description of how they came to be using this particular health clinic, an inmate's description of the way decisions affecting her are made and communicated.

Level 2 – Interactive Positioning: Examines the positioning of the readership or audience vis-a-vis the story. A story describes and positions its audience. For example, textual choices (form again) position the reader (or audience) and orient them towards characters in particular ways. emerald's early work demonstrated how the use of a character's name, especially in combination with paragraph structure and the way other characters are named in reference to this character (*his* dad, *his* friend rather than say, John and Al) worked to align a reader with that character in a novel for children (*The Machine Gunners*). This textual alignment demonstrated the textual construction of the psychological concept of 'identifying' with a character in a novel. In another example, notice how children's picture books position their child readers in particular ways, as responsive to simplified language (form), bright illustrations (form) and certain topics (content), for example. In your PA^{t}R project, this form of analysis might examine the way policy documents or newsletters position the reader – as complicit with the message of the document, for example, or as outside the main business of the institution. For example, letters home to emerald from her daughter's school often began by reminding the reader

that they have agreed to a certain code of behaviour upon enrolling in the school. This positions the reader as legally required to be compliant with the directives in the forthcoming text.

Level 3 – The Story's Intersection with Dominant Discourses: This level of analysis considers the way that the stories' participants tell position them in terms of the dominant stories of the culture. It also considers the relation between participants' stories and the narratives of the culture. For example, participants may position themselves as embracing or opposing, sustaining or undermining, the culture's narratives. Carpenter and emerald (2009) analyse the ways that the stories that mothers of children with hidden disability tell at times comply and at times counter the culture's dominant narratives of 'good mothering'. We explore Carpenter and emerald's work in more detail below. In your PA^{t}R project, this level of positioning analysis might reveal, for example, the ways that social workers work with or against the expectations that their clients' hold of them based in the clients' cultural understanding of the role of the worker.

You can see how these elements (form, content function) and levels of analysis can be drawn together to create research texts within a narrative inquiry. Further, each might be taken up more specifically as the main form of analysis. Again, and always, the path through field and research texts is determined by your research question and your philosophical orientations (in essence, what information do I need to answer this question, and how will I look at the information to give insight to this question).

An Example of Narrative Inquiry

In this section, we will outline a narrative inquiry in some detail. This will act as a demonstration of a way, amongst the many ways, of drawing together field texts as research texts. This inquiry was informed by some of the analytic features explained above and by a form of thematic analysis. Carpenter and emerald's (2009) research is concerned to understand the experience of women mothering children with hidden disability (in this case ADHD or ASD). They make a distinction between the terms *story* and *narrative*. They define *story* as a structure used by an individual for the communication of an experience and re-presentation of action. They draw on McAllister's (2001) to describe *narrative* as 'a scheme used by people to give meaning to their experience' (p. 391). For example, a *cultural narrative*, sometimes called a myth, is a collective cultural wisdom. This wisdom, while not universal, is beyond personal experience. Personal experience may even be quite different to this wisdom. Some cultural narratives might be, for example, the general cultural expectations of what constitutes a normal pregnancy (Throsby 2004), or the understanding of older people as being asexual (Jones 2004) or the cultural expectations of the mother role (Carpenter and Austin 2007; Hays 1996). Narratives then are the broad cultural understandings, the myths of society and culture that shape and constrain

and give meaning to experience. Bamberg (2004) reminds us that 'while master narratives normalize and naturalize and as such constrain and delineate agency, they also give guidance and direction to the everyday actions of subjects' (p. 361).

Carpenter and emerald (2009) are interested in the role of the culture's driving narratives in constructing the stories people tell of themselves. In order to understand the cultural narratives of motherhood, they firstly made a historical review of the influences on mothering since the early 1900s (tracing the advice and guidance to mothers in what we might call English-speaking Western democracies, Australia, the UK, the USA, Canada) and a contemporary review of media sources (magazines, newspaper, movies, blogs, mothering websites). They then analysed the stories women told of their experiences mothering in their difficult and unusual circumstances and noted the ways women spoke to and against the culture's narratives of good motherhood. They demonstrate the ways that participants' stories, in what appears to be a double movement, at once *rely* on cultural narratives to be sense-able (that is able to be made sense of) and *support* those narratives, be it through affirming or opposing them. For example, women talk *to* and *against* the cultural narrative of motherhood in their stories, at times noting the gulf between the narrative and their experience and at times drawing on the narrative as legitimation for their action. For example, when describing good mothering Rose said:

> Being caring and dedicated – giving one hundred and fifty percent

Here Rose both draws on understandings of mothers being sacrificial and supports and constructs that understanding as a feature of good motherhood, by naming and legitimating it as a practice.

Participants may even name or describe cultural narratives, as Kate did in Carpenter and emerald's study:

> Women tend to sacrifice for their children I wonder what predisposes us to that? Is it our journey that we're meant to make or is it that we've done it for so long before the child was diagnosed & so hard that we just got used to it & got into the swing of things in the sacrificial mode & we just keep doing it on auto. I ask myself the question how did I ever get into this. Always sacrificing & forgetting about myself. It's just the way I think. I have to stop myself & think hang on she can't have that. You have to give yourself something.

In this extract, Kate describes the cultural narrative of motherhood 'Women tend to sacrifice for their children' and explicitly reflects on it 'I wonder what predisposes us to that?'

As an analyst, a question is, how do you hear the power of a cultural narrative? As we see above, it is often embedded in the accounts people give for their actions, particularly so when it comes to their own specific case or experience. The logic goes something like this: 'yes I know I should … (insert action or attribute that is drawn from a cultural narrative) … but (insert reason that makes this logic not applicable in this particular circumstance)'. For example, 'yes I know I should give my child a healthy breakfast but we are in a rush in the mornings and he'll only eat Sugar Bites. It's not worth the tantrum'. The authority of the cultural narrative of good mothering and good nutrition is available to us as analysts when we hear accounts like this. In your PA^{t}R project, you may find people giving just such

accounts and telling stories that rely on our understanding of the culture's narratives to make sense.

Carpenter and emerald drew on a thematic analysis to inform their narrative analysis. We will explain thematic analysis here and then return to how Carpenter and emerald employed it in their research.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis can be fruitfully applied within or alongside narrative analysis or as a way to approach more routine question/answer interview data. Like narrative analysis, there are many permutations of this analytic as the field develops. Boyatzis (1998, p. 4) explains a theme as a 'pattern found in the information that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon'. Thematic analysis is the identification and interpretation of these themes. The data of thematic analysis are the 'words, actions or other observable aspects of a person's life' (Boyatzis 1998, p. xii). As a method, it is flexible and accessible to both the neophyte researcher and the neophyte reader as results often present as almost intuitively sense-able. As an analytic, it can be used to generate a rich description of a large data set and summarise its key aspects, as well as similarities and differences across the data set. Thematic analysis is often used within other analytic traditions, perhaps as a strand of evidence in an argument rather than a stand-alone analytic, or at times, alongside another analytic such that their insights inform and enrich each other in formulating a qualitative account of the context.

It is worth noting that these advantages of thematic analysis have at times worked against its acceptance as a rigorous empirical tool. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 78) lament that 'an absence of clear and concise guidelines around thematic analysis means that the "anything goes" critique [...] may well apply in some instances'. However, like any analytic technique (arguably), thematic analysis, either as a term or technique, is open to sloppy and reductive application or, just as damaging if not more so, the perception of such. Boyatzis (1998) details a method and Braun and Clarke (2006) set out a frame to formulate and explicate the methods and the theoretical underpinning of a thematic analysis. These texts, amongst others, deliberately aim to mitigate both misapplication by the researcher and dismissal by the reader.

Identifying Themes in Thematic Analysis

When identifying themes, Braun and Clarke (2006) pose three points of clarification that should be clearly articulated in each case of thematic research. Two of these pertain to the actual reasoning and method of identifying themes and one to the underlying epistemological understandings. The first point of clarification is whether

the identification of themes is inductive (data driven) or theoretical (analyst or question driven). Inductive (data driven) themes appear within the words and syntax of the raw information. It is the task of the researcher to interpret the meaning after obtaining the findings and to construct a theory after the discovery of the results. Theoretical thematic analysis (analyst or question driven) is driven by a particular research interest within the data and therefore is more explicitly analyst driven (Braun and Clarke 2006). In this case, themes might be generated deductively from theory or from prior research (Boyatzis 1998), and you as a researcher approach the data 'looking for' evidence of these themes.

Secondly, the 'level' at which themes are identified, semantic/manifest or latent/interpretative. Semantic or manifest themes are identified in the raw data, recognising only the explicit or surface meanings to the words that people use. The analyst is looking to organise the data to show patterns in semantic content, summarise the patterns and theorise their significance. Latent or interpretative identification of themes examines the assumptions and ideologies that underpin what is in the data. In this sense, the identification of themes exceeds the semantic content, and it moves beyond the words to theorise in terms of the broader assumptions and structures that are taken to underpin what is in the data.

The third point of clarification is whether the research can be described as epistemologically realist or constructionist [sic], or somewhere in between (contextualist). As we noted in Chap. 4, research epistemology informs how meaning is theorised and therefore guides what can be said about data. In a realist/essentialist epistemology, a largely unidirectional relationship is assumed between meaning and experience and language. Language is taken to unproblematically reflect experience, and therefore, a participant's words are heard as a straightforward reflection of reality, motivations and experience. A constructionist epistemology, on the other hand, takes it that meaning and experience are socially produced and reproduced; therefore, events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society (rather than simply and transparently expressed through those discourses). A constructionist research seeks to understand the sociocultural contexts and structural conditions that enable an individual's account of experience and meaning. Something of a midway epistemological position is the contextualist, which acknowledges 'the ways individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings, while retaining focus on the material and other limits of reality' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 81).

Returning to the Carpenter and emerald (2009) example, they engaged these points to position themselves explicitly as:

1. Data driven, as they found themes in the data by identifying the patterns of responses and then questioning whether the patterns revealed something about the data in relation to their research concern. So their analysis is data driven within their analytic question.
2. Semantic/manifest *and* latent/interpretative, in that once themes were identified in the data, they examined both the significance of these themes in terms of the

consequences in the daily lives of women and the underlying cultural narratives (ideas, assumptions and ideologies) that the participants reference in making meaning from their experience.
3. Epistemologically constructionist *and* contextualist.

To demonstrate by example, we saw above, when talking about being a good mother, Rose said:

> Being caring and dedicated – giving one hundred and fifty percent.

Many others said similar, so Carpenter and emerald understood a theme of motherhood as vocation was emerging in the women's stories of good motherhood. Carpenter and emerald then looked for the cultural and social understandings of motherhood that make such an utterance understandable within a narrative of good motherhood (rather than, say, an indication of an unhealthily obsessive codependent relationship). Epistemologically, this is recognisable as a constructionist move in that it looks to understand the sociocultural and structural context that makes any one individual account possible, rather than take the words as simple reflections of a reality or truth (which might be, in Rose's utterance above, that good mothers give unendingly to their children). Carpenter and emerald also recognise that 'the broader social context impinges on [those] meaning[s]' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 85), which is an epistemologically contextualist move. Hence, the reflexive relation between the women's stories of good mothering that construct motherhood as a vocation and the cultural narrative of good motherhood can be articulated. In their talk, women at once draw on a cultural narrative that constructs motherhood as vocational and all consuming, *and* construct and support that cultural narrative of good motherhood. Further, as analysts, we have to draw on the same narratives of good mothering to hear this sacrificial version of mothering as laudable (rather than say, pathological, as such a relationship might be heard in some other relationship contexts).

In your PA^{t}R project, you may have gathered field texts in the form of interviews, documents, visual stories, audiovisual stories and more. You see here that identifying themes is not a simple matter of wandering through the field texts and picking out what looks interesting. Boyatzis (1998) details an extensive process of detecting, describing and exemplifying. Carpenter and emerald adapted this process and developed a grid of themes which they organised under two topic headings: 'good mother/bad mother' and 'mothers' experiences'. In their work, each theme is described and an example given. They then go on to discuss these themes, with many more examples over the course of two analytic chapters (Carpenter and emerald 2009). The themes identified within the topic 'good mother/bad mother' are reproduced here as an example (Fig. 7.2).

In discussing this analysis, Carpenter and emerald consider the effect of these themes in the women's lives and the relationship between these themes and cultural narratives of good mothering. Carpenter and emerald used the women's stories to demonstrate the intractable tensions of the motherhood narratives they try to live by. They conclude with a series of calls to action as implications of their analysis.

	Theme	Brief description and example
Good mother / bad mother	Motherhood as vocation	Mothering spoken of as: intense, natural, central to their child and themselves, beyond choice, a duty, in response to a summons or calling. *You brought them into this world. They're yours and they are your responsibility until they're ready to look after themselves. (Pam)*
	Guilt	Guilt and Blame as prevalent in the mothering experience. *I blamed myself in the beginning. I thought 'What did I do wrong in the pregnancy?' What happened that he turned out like this?(Leanne)*
	Loss of mother role	Unable to be the mother of their hopes or imaginings, a loss of their idealised mother-role. *My mother was a particularly good mother and that's a standard I'd like to live up to. .... I get frustrated when I can't do it (Mary)*
	Counter-narrative mother	Good mothering in this context can look different to the good mother of the cultural narratives. For example, medicating your child can be a sign of good mothering – contrary to some mother-narratives: *You have to do what's best for the child. I don't feel that guilt any more because I can see the difference the medication makes so she must need it. (Rose)*
	Advocate	As a mother you become an advocate for the child, negotiating relationships within the family and between the child and the world (school, extended family, friends) *You have to fight for your child and for yourself as well. You've got to ask for whatever you get. (Jill)*
	Strong	As a mother you are strong, or you become strong. *[Mothering an ADHD child] hurts but it's made me stronger. It can destroy some people who aren't strong. I had to learn I was a strong person. I learnt to stand on my own two feet. (Gaye)*
	Not a bad mother	Not such a bad mother spoken as things I don't do, which others might do, or things I don't do even though under such pressure *I looked at the worst thing I've done and how I feel. I thought 'Well the things that I have been doing are right and I haven't really done anything bad so that makes me feel good.' I am the same as the other ADD mothers and what I was doing was right. (Cleo)*

Fig. 7.2 Themes – good mother/bad mother from Carpenter and emerald (2009, p. 28)

Descriptive Statistics

Statistics analyse numbers or quantitative data. Descriptive statistics do not employ concepts of probability; rather, they summarise numerical information to describe a situation. Simple graphical displays such as charts, tables, histograms, pie charts and graphs provide useful summaries of means, frequencies, distributions, modes and standard deviation. Spreadsheet software, see, for example, Excel, can perform a range of statistical tasks. There are also more advanced or specific software that are still easy to learn, such as SPSS, that is, Statistical Package for Social Science. Unless you have had training in statistics, however, it is worthwhile either working with a statistician or exploring software package guidebooks to find out what questions you can ask of the field texts and which field texts are best suited to answering your particular questions. And of course, if your field texts are relatively small

Table 7.1 Sample field text – a section of a questionnaire completed by an individual student (*filled square*)

Physical education	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I have fun in PE	☺	⊕	😐	⊗	■
2. PE is good exercise	☺	⊕	😐	⊗	■
3. I don't get to be with my friends in PE	■	⊕	😐	⊗	☹
4. PE is a stressful time	☺	⊕	😐	⊗	■
5. I learn more in the classroom than in PE	☺	■	😐	⊗	☹
6. I am not very good at PE	☺	⊕	😐	■	☹
7. I feel uncoordinated in PE	☺	⊕	😐	■	☹
8. PE allows you to be with friends	☺	⊕	😐	■	☹
9. I don't like physical activity	☺	⊕	😐	⊗	■
10. In PE you get to relax	☺	⊕	😐	⊗	■
11. I am good at PE	☺	■	😐	⊗	☹
12. PE is boring	■	⊕	😐	⊗	☹
13. PE is a good change to the classroom	☺	⊕	😐	⊗	■
14. PE is good because you get to be physically active	☺	⊕	😐	⊗	■
15. I like PE because we learn new skills	☺	⊕	😐	⊗	■
16. I avoid PE when I can	■	⊕	😐	⊗	☹
17. PE is an easy class	■	⊕	😐	⊗	☹
18. I learn new games in PE	☺	⊕	😐	⊗	■
19. I like PE	☺	⊕	😐	⊗	■
20. I like PE because of the teacher	☺	⊕	😐	⊗	■
21. In PE I feel left out	■	⊕	😐	⊗	☹
22. I like being outside (outdoors) in PE	☺	■	😐	⊗	☹

and you are just looking to see what descriptive picture the figures reveal, simple calculations using a calculator might suffice. For example, you might be trying to find out the average hours of overtime that your nursing staff do throughout the year, or the median distance the local senior population travels to do their shopping. Using a survey, you might want to know the relationship between the population of men who have sex with men (MSM) and those with HIV/AIDS, or the issues for young people in your region or institution. In a study looking at the issues for primary students about to transfer to secondary schools, Hunter (2002) used descriptive statistics from student questionnaires to create tables that showed percentage results for each student response option on a Likert scale (see Table 7.1).

The results were collated as a research text in the form of a table that included student results as percentage responses to the statement and included the position of the two teacher results (Table 7.2).

Table 7.2 Sample research text – collated responses of all students (number %) and teachers (classroom teacher and specialist teacher) relating to health

	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. PE makes me healthy	46 **s**	29 **c**	21	0	4
2. Healthy people look fit	42 **s**	42 **c**	8	8	0
3. I am healthy	42	21 **s**	25	8 **c**	4
4. I eat mostly healthy foods	33	29	12 **s**	21	4 **c**
5. Healthy people exercise few times a week	29 **s**	50 **c**	17	0	4
6. I do exercise or play sport regularly (other than PE)	58	33 **c**	4 **s**	4	0
7. You have to exercise regularly to be healthy	50	29 **s**	8	12 **c**	0
8. Fit people are healthy people	35	26 **s**	13	26 **c**	0
9. Things around me can affect my health more than I can	21	25 **c**	29	25 **s**	0
10. I eat a lot of junk food	8 **c**	25 **s**	8	46	12
11. One part of being healthy is being happy	54 **sc**	37	0	4	4

Table 7.2 indicates that 46% of students strongly agreed with the statement 'PE makes me healthy', 29% agreed, 21% were unsure, none disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed. The specialist teacher 'strongly agreed' and the classroom teacher 'agreed'.

This was useful in referring to the homogeneity and difference within the student group as well as the assumptions made about the group by the specialist physical education teacher and generalist classroom teacher. As with all research texts, one must take particular care in interpretation, being sure not to infer more than is available in the information presented. For example, in this instance, the same students completed the questionnaire before they transferred to high school and again after they transferred. But, while the group itself was the same, the contexts changed in that the students went to different schools. So a comparison between the two points in time could only be used on an individual case basis to suggest effects on individuals of changing school sites and effects over time. No conclusions can be drawn for the group as a whole.

Summary or descriptive statistics represent some important aspect of a field text by reducing the information to a single number. Here we list some descriptive statistics that you could well enlist with little or no specialist aid.

The level of distribution is represented by measures of central tendency, that is, single figures that represent the distribution, the most well known being the 'average'.

Mean: The mean is calculated by adding all the scores and dividing by the number of scores, people often refer to this as the 'average'.
Median: The score in the middle of all scores arranged in order of their size.
Mode: The most frequently occurring value.

You need to think carefully about what each of these pieces of information is telling you and whether it is sensible and useful information. For example, in a population in workplace, you might find that one person earns $150,000 per year, two earn $60,000, five earn $20,000 and one earns $10,000. The mean, or average, income then is $42,223 per year. To say that the mean (average) income for this group of nine workers is $42,223, although the case, is actually not as useful as it might seem, as in fact six people of the nine earn considerably less. As a rule of thumb, it is wise to be cognizant of the shortfalls of the notion of 'average'. As a 'statistic', it is often used to authorise statements, whereas one outlier can skew the results into meaninglessness; imagine if Bill Gates got on the bus with you, the average income of the people on the bus would now be millions of dollars! The median income might be more meaningful, $20,000, but in fact, depending on what you are trying to understand, the mode might the most meaningful – that is, what most people earn.

A little more complex are:

Variability summarises the spread. This will indicate whether scores are clustered tightly together or widely spread.
Range: The difference between the lowest and highest score
Variance: The deviation of individual scores from the mean
Standard Deviation: The square root of the variance

In the income example above, you can see that these measures of variation can give pertinent information that considerably enriches simple measure of mean, median and mode, giving a more thorough understanding of outlying cases and distribution. As always, it will depend on what you are trying to find out. On a survey of client satisfaction, for example, a mean may not be useful to you, but the mode and measures of variation (variability and range say) may well be.

To go beyond the use of these descriptive statistics, you might want to analyse the relationships between two variables. You might wish to explore the relationship between your nursing colleagues' overtime hours and the number of ward accidents, or the relationship between local young peoples' sexualities and street violence reports. Cross-tabulation, chi-square tests, scattergrams and correlation coefficients can be used to indicate different forms of relationships in the field texts. For analysis of relationships amongst three or more variables, you can use approaches such as three-variable contingency tables, multiple regression and multivariate analyses. These analyses are more complex and not within the skill set of most neophyte researchers. Such analyses will be available to you through statistical packages or the consultation of a statistician.

Statistics are particularly good to use when working with large numbers of field texts, for example, a survey of all 3,000 people in a small town, or when you want to limit the number of responses to, say, a choice of five options per question. As such, statistics are useful where a quick response from many is required or where many can answer with the minimum interaction and time from the researcher. Statistical approaches are not as useful for small-group projects or where the complexities of lives require ongoing and in-depth methods. Statistically driven methods

of field text and research text construction require skill in both the design of the field text stimulus and appropriate analysis. For example, some new researchers fall in to the trap of imagining that surveys are simple to write, but as we noted in Chap. 6, there are dangers and pitfalls, and at the very least, you should pilot your field text instruments on colleagues. Likewise, consider carefully what the statistical analysis is aiming to achieve and talk it through thoroughly with your PA^{t}R team.

As we repeat again and again, whatever the form of analysis, you must ensure that it is driven by your research question/s, matched to the method that best answers that question, and situated within your philosophical orientations.

Content/Document Analysis

Content analysis is a common form of analysis using documents such as letters, meeting minutes, policies, speeches, case records, school curricula, timetables, photographs, films, newspaper and magazine articles or a book. The document acts as the field text although it has been created for some other use (not to be a field text). Such documents can be analysed unobtrusively. The purpose of the document analysis is to tease out the purpose of the document, its authenticity, the intention of the writers, as well as cultural, social and institutional aspects. Quantitative and qualitative methods might be used for content analysis. For example, studies have determined the quantitative content of media (newspaper, radio air time, television news reports) using statistics to investigate the breakdown of male-focused, female-focused and animal-focused sport in newspapers, while other studies have focused on the quality of media texts to ascertain whether sports reports were about performance or some other features of the sportspeople concerned (e.g. attractiveness, behaviour, status). For example, lisahunter and emerald, in a research project exploring the public pedagogies of surfing magazines, reviewed surfing magazines in terms of a simple quantitative analysis of photographs of males and females and then a further qualitative analysis of those images in terms of whether they depicted the male or female as firstly involved in the sport or not (i.e. surfing images rather than advertising images for example), and if involved in the sport, whether depicted as a participant in surfing or a spectator of surfing. Further qualitative analysis of the images determined whether the participant was portrayed in terms of sexualised imagery or performance. The outcomes of this research are sadly predictable.

Clearly, being able to access existing field text documents is unobtrusive, allows for reanalysis (as they are in a permanent form) and may be low cost, particularly if you need to engage with some issue longitudinally (e.g. examining changes in policy over time). However, some of the disadvantages include the difficulty in assessing whether the documents are caused by social phenomena or a reflection of them, to what extent the documents are partial or limited in use, and what biases might be embedded in the very form of the document. An example might be when

using patient records as field texts, there are constraints on what information is included and biases through who enters the information or even whether it gets to be included (in the case of different nurses attending the one patient). But also, there might be important information left out of the chart, information that, unless sought elsewhere through your research, may go unnoticed in its absence, yet be pivotal in the changes you are seeking. Because of disadvantages such as this, content analysis is often used as a supplementary method.

To carry out a content analysis, you might need to decide on a sampling strategy so that the task is manageable. Again, dependent on your research question or issue, you may need to collect random samples, in the instance where you have high numbers of the same type of document you want to analyse (e.g. patient care files in a large hospital), or you may need to collect all samples of a specific document over time (e.g. all the narratives written by a particular student over one school year). You then need to decide upon your unit of analysis; is it the words in the document, the characters mentioned, whole articles and so on? You can see how content analysis can intersect with the preceding sections on thematic analysis and narrative analysis. Computer software packages such as Leximancer can provide word frequency lists to determine which words are used most often in the document. There can also be category counts and more complex criteria for searching, such as co-location of words or phrases.

In identifying what is said in the document, you might employ categories such as values revealed, subject matter, the actors represented, the direction of the subject matter or how it is treated, where the action takes place, who is authorised to make the statements, what conflicts arise and how are they resolved, where are the sources of conflict and what methods are used to resolve them. When doing any form of coding, you need to sort out the categories before beginning the analysis, and you need to test your coding on samples to establish reliability between researchers (are all coders reading the text the same way and interpreting the codes the same way), if there is more than one, and within each researcher (is each coder consistent over time). For example, in the lisahunter and emerald research above, did both researchers code images in the same way and did each researcher code consistently over time? Notice how in Carpenter and emerald's (2009) thematic analysis described above, the means and matter of the thematic coding were made explicit to the reader. These are all important matters in establishing the validity and reliability of your research findings. Then, as exemplified here, in applying the analysis, you can work statistically or qualitatively to make sense of the document/s.

This chapter has introduced you to some means of creating research texts from your field texts. You will be getting a clear sense by now of how closely interwoven decisions about philosophical orientations (epistemology, ontology, ethics), methodological concerns, methods, field text construction and research text construction are. Each decision you make is reasoned and thoughtful and with purpose. Perhaps it feels a little overwhelming to you right now! Chapter 10 will step through how Gregory Martin has negotiated this complex process, and Chap. 11 provides an annotated bibliography to enrich your reading.

Guiding/Clarifying Questions

1. Describe our use of the terms ‘field text’ and ‘research text’.
2. Give a short description of each of the analytics described here:
   - CDA
   - Ideology critique
   - Narrative inquiry
   - Thematic analysis
   - Descriptive statistics
   - Content analysis
3. List the field texts most suitable to each analytic.
4. Create a graphic to describe the relationship between philosophical orientation, research question, methods, field texts and research texts.
5. Note which analytics you will do further research on.

Extending Your Reading

We have listed a few books and articles below – however, you can approach your extended reading either by searching for:

1. *General research analysis books:*
   Qualitative Analysis
   Qualitative Analysis Handbook
   Quantitative Analysis
2. *Research analysis* books particular to your field:
   Research Qualitative in Social Work
   Qualitative Analysis in Social Work
   Qualitative Analysis in Education
3. *Specific analysis:*
   CDA
   Ideology critique
   Narrative inquiry
   Thematic analysis
   Descriptive statistics
   Content analysis
4. *Specific analysis in your field:*
   CDA in Education, in Social Work…
   Narrative Inquiry in Nursing, in Education…
   Thematic Analysis in…
   Descriptive statistics…
   Content analysis … and so forth

Also, there are several books on Action Research in libraries. These often have sections on analysis.

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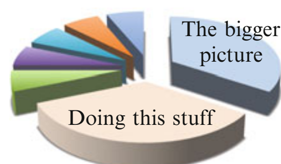
Part C
Going Public

Chapter 8
Difficulties, Limitations and Cautions

Section C: Going public

- **Difficulties, limitations, cautions**
- Checklist for activist researchers
- Example: LEAP
- Examples in professional fields
- Presenting research for audience



In this chapter, we will discuss some of the difficulties, limitations and cautions of doing PA^{t}R. All research approaches have strengths and limitations. Some limitations can be taken into account, and when this is done, it can strengthen the research. Other dangers and limitations are complex, extremely fast moving and unpredictable, which is related to the humanness of working with human participants! Given the emphasis on power, process and relationships, PA^{t}R requires careful planning and constant negotiation. At the intersection of CT (critical theory, Chap. 3) and practice, PA^{t}R tends to make any inherent tensions or contradictions in relationships and practices quite explicit and apparent. This means that before, during and after the research, caution always needs to be observed. Although the researcher and participants are engaged in the same process, it is often experienced differently. In their book *Danger in the Field*, Lee-Treweek and Linkogle (2000) discuss how feminist research contributed to a broad discussion about 'the need for consideration of the risk to all participants and those affected by research' (p. 15). This includes preventing the research from placing participants (or allowing participants to push others) in uncomfortable or dangerous situations, particularly when 'the

lisahunter et al., *Participatory Activist Research in the Globalised World: Social Change Through the Cultural Professions*, Explorations of Educational Purpose 26,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4426-4_8, © Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2013

field' (itself a masculinist concept – for example, see Rose 1996; Sparke 1996) is overlaid with personal meanings and power relations.

Acknowledging the ontology of danger also means more than following the 'official' rules, given the personal- and context-dependent characteristics of the research. Although it is often overlooked, Lee-Treweek and Linkogle (2000) include the need to address or 'manage the emotions of research participants and not leave them with painful baggage from the research experience' (p. 15). Of course, the research process may not always open up participants to 'painful' emotions or make them vulnerable to harm or coercion. It may in fact be a pleasurable, creative and constructive outlet. Given the emphasis on self-reflexivity, however, it is important that activist researchers learn how to manage the added emotional burdens of activist research (including both the highs and the lows) for themselves and the participants. And certainly, as we have suggested repeatedly, this involves careful planning and consideration by the researcher and participants alike of the 'possible consequences of research' and working together to productively engage with loss or disappointment (p. 15).

Trust

One way to promote maximum participation and to construct a sense of community is to create safe spaces as part of the research process (Campbell et al. 2004). To build trust in both the early and later stages, the settings chosen for interviews, meetings or focus groups should allow for the tentative exploration of ideas, values and research directions. Setting the right atmosphere and mood is important in creating the conditions for people affected by the issue to tell their stories. For example, this might mean establishing the ground rules for behaviour at meetings so that each participant has an equal opportunity to express their views or concerns (Stringer 1996). In our own work, we have found that participants from privileged backgrounds, including members of the dominant culture such as Anglo-European males, are often unaware of how they can monopolise group discussion (Martin 2005). This is because their dominant status is not evident to them, and they have been socialised to view their right to speak as an entitlement. To make matters worse, they may also trivialise, patronise or even dismiss the experiences, values and perspectives of other individuals based on their age, gender, ethnicity or religion.

To address discrimination and inequality, it is vital to implement culturally and linguistically inclusive practices such as making meetings as accessible as possible (close to public transport and with disability access), preparing appropriate (translated) materials and making use of available interpreter services. For example, you may need to organise interpreters and note takers for participants who have a hearing impairment. To avoid discussions becoming dominated by any particular individual or group, you might need to discipline the flow of talk by limiting the amount of time each person can speak and by prioritising the voices of quieter group members (Martin 2005). Body language, tone of voice, use of language and eye contact

(sometimes avoided out of sensitivity to culture, age or status) are all essential for fostering generative cycles of questioning, dialogue and intercultural understanding. Hopefully, if you attend to these, it will help to avoid meetings becoming captured by individual personalities or bogged down in acrimonious debates.

Lightly acknowledging differences or using humour in a socially supportive manner can also diffuse difficult situations or offer a moment of escape from discomfort. However, this is not always possible, and managing tension (including silences) within group meetings is important to fostering productive dialogue. Bearing this point in mind, we want to point out that there is a lack of agreement on how to address power differentials and other tensions embedded within the research process. So, these are suggestions, rather than prescriptions, for how to address potential communication gaps. Along these lines, we recommend Stringer's (1996) book *Action Research: A Handbook for Practitioners* as a good starting point if you wish to explore this topic further.

At the same time, caution need not become a paternalistic formulation or excuse for maintaining the status quo. Given the multiple challenges of doing PA^{t}R, in some ways, it is often easier just to go with the flow and do conventional research. In this sense, PA^{t}R is a messy and iterative approach that contrasts strongly with the clear, predictable and linear model of traditional quantitative or qualitative research. Traditional research is not concerned with understanding and transforming power relations and attempts to eliminate the possibility of any 'contaminating' factors or variables. While a certain degree of subjectivity is unavoidable, traditional research attempts to minimise its 'distorting' effects. Rather than seek to deny it, PA^{t}R embraces the unfolding complexity and messiness that surrounds struggles around issues to do with subjectivity, difference and power, for example, arguments over interpretation or priorities. A researcher can consult a textbook filled with practical tips but still run up against all sorts of social variables and social forces that can impact upon the process. Thus, it is important to side with caution in order to minimise potential harm. Being always in consultation and negotiation can mean that concessions need to be made. But it does not mean acquiescence or wholehearted acceptance.

Limitations and Cautions

Accounts of AR (action research,) and PAR (participatory action research, see Chap. 2) contain cogent and convincing warnings about the limits and challenges of 'doing' PA^{t}R. These should not be taken lightly. You will need to use your best professional judgement and exercise caution to respond to particular situations. Given you may be new to the profession, you are advised to always run your plans past a 'critical friend' who has a good sense of the profession and the context of the research. From the start, it is important not to romanticise PA^{t}R as it requires a significant investment in time, energy and resources and is challenging for everyone involved (Moore 2004). Unfortunately, most research operates within the context of limited resources

and time constraints, which tends to impede the development of understanding and the potential for action. For example, the pressing nature of the problem or issue itself, funding processes, bureaucratic imperatives or even the requirement to complete an action research project to meet the objectives of a university course can squeeze the time required (between other commitments) to engage in creative thought and action as well as create a good deal of anxiety.

Although it may seem 'easy', it can be more challenging than traditional forms of quantitative research (particularly when it comes to obtaining funding). At the risk of repeating ourselves, we think it is helpful to remind you of Tripp (1996) who writes that the action research sequence should be carefully thought out, analysed and planned. Any planning requires a systematic process to address all potential impacts on the research. This includes developing a culture of open and honest communication from the very beginning. For example, if you are invited into a community as an 'expert', this might mean establishing your presence by informing the group (and not just those in positions of authority) of your role and purpose in a 'nonthreatening' way to ensure genuine dialogue, the sharing of knowledge and feedback (Stringer 1996 p. 43). The key here is to be as flexible as possible and to negotiate both your role and the processes within the constraints of the research, for example, the time constraints imposed on student research. When negotiating access and entry to a research site, difficulties can arise for the novice or 'newcomer' (particularly if they have been invited into a setting as a 'change agent') if they have not done a lot of preparatory work to become more knowledgeable about the setting and all the key stakeholders (pp. 47–49). Rather than acting like an 'all-knowing expert', Stringer suggests that it helps 'to be perceived as skilled, supportive, resourceful, and approachable' (p. 46). He adds:

> The task of the community-based researcher, therefore, is to develop a context in which individuals and groups with divergent perceptions and interpretations can formulate a construction of their situation that 'makes sense' to them all – a joint construction. (1996, p. 41)

Bishop and Glynn (2003) argue that this aspect should not be confused with simply building relationships and making friends. With a focus on local capacity building, they argue 'that researchers must be self-aware of their position within the relationship and aware of their need for engagement in power-sharing processes' (p. 97).

While not always admitted, there are instances of research being suppressed for challenging the status quo. Fine and Torre (2008) warn that 'even with permissions, approvals and collaborations at the top, participatory action research is often quite inflammatory' (p. 48). Remember, there is always someone with a vested interest in the status quo, even in what seems a most innocuous change or bland suggestion. Despite the challenges of suppression or political interference, participatory forms of qualitative research are increasingly accepted and adopted as valid forms of research in applied areas such as education, health, social work and organisational management.

Still, as if that were not enough, traditional researchers also habitually raise questions about the validity of 'openly ideological research' (Lather 1986). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) discuss some of these challenges and political battles, fought on a constantly moving terrain, and the 'sometimes anguished history' of qualitative research (p. 1). Despite gains in recognition in the 1970s, they write, 'Qualitative researchers are called journalists, or soft scientists. Their work is termed unscientific, or only exploratory, or subjective. It is called criticism and not theory, or it is interpreted politically, as a disguised version of Marxism or secular humanism' (pp. 7–8). As they note, 'The challenges to qualitative research are many' (p. 7). The fact that research such as PA^{t}R has an unabashed political purpose often compounds scepticism and resistance. For example, Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) discuss the resistance PAR can encounter, including claims 'that it lacks scientific rigor, confusing social activism and community development with research' (p. 568). Taking an optimistic view of PAR, they argue however that these challenges have only served to strengthen it 'in theory and practice' (p. 595).

Research not only takes place within many different venues but also within a broad social and historical context. This can place great demands on both the theory and methods used for PA^{t}R. Theoretically and practically, PA^{t}R has to work within/against prevailing social conditions. Finding a 'friendly' context for CT to take root and thrive has never been easy. While there are always points of resistance, the impact of neo-liberalism and new forms of managerialism make it difficult to engage in processes of political change. In the public sector such as education, health and social services, new managerialism is the application of private sector techniques that are designed to enhance efficiency and productivity, particularly through the development of new accountability and audit processes (Blackmore and Sachs 2007). The introduction of new managerial regimes is supposed to change the culture of public sector organisations, with an emphasis on transparency, work rationality, target setting, performance monitoring and calculability. There are plenty of criticisms of new managerialism, particularly with how it has impacted upon the development of professional identity and work. Some theorists argue that its action frame has led to the erosion of collective culture, identity and agency (Giroux 2004). Within the rise of the global audit culture, Peters (2007) highlights how practitioners must increasingly justify their actions and understandings as bureaucratically rational, efficient and defensible. Following on from this, Jones and Stanley (2011) draw upon their own experience as leaders of a collaborative action research project in the UK to argue, 'Action research in such a context is highly challenged in its endeavour to live up to its ideals' (p. 4).

Critique is part of a process of transformation and is to be understood as different to just criticising. With the imposition of the policy agendas mentioned above, it is often difficult to figure out how to engage in PA^{t}R, particularly when it is viewed incorrectly as just criticising or complaining. It is also difficult to engage in processes that might be regarded as disruptive or unproductive, two claims that might be used by those who want to resist transformation. What is important to remember is that PA^{t}R is not necessarily, or wholly, negative. PA^{t}R requires simultaneous acts of negation (of injustice) and affirmation (of new kinds of relationships) or what

Freire (1985) also referred to as a process of ‘denunciation and annunciation’ (p. 58). With an emphasis on progressive or emancipatory social change, PA^{t}R embodies an ethos of affirmation that is concerned with the transformation of a negative situation into a positive one. PA^{t}R, therefore, is a journey of transcendence. It can provide valuable insight into processes for change and act as the spark for political and social action. At the same time, critique is often a thankless task, particularly if it keeps issues and problems alive that some would prefer remained silent. Indeed, it is notoriously difficult to do both within the confines of professional convention or when you are confronted by someone in a position of authority. Perhaps for this reason, and others, most research does not engage in negative critique. It tends to be affirmative of the existing order of things with a focus on functional or incremental improvements rather than seeking to enact substantial change.

PA^{t}R goes beyond a simple level of descriptiveness or theoretical critique. It passes through both of these into the realm of transformative praxis. Indeed, PA^{t}R itself is not immune to critique. PA^{t}R recognises that the effort to democratise knowledge and power through an emancipatory research framework can result in damage for the local participants, for example, in the form of reprisals. This is why it is vitally important for the researcher to understand the issues and the local power structure and context from the perspective of the participants. Using critical theory as a guide, McLaren (1995) maintains that educational research ‘must be organic to and not administered upon’ (p. 291). Clearly, it is of vital importance to understand how the situated understandings that make up the participants’ own beliefs influence what counts as valid and relevant knowledge in the context. It is also important to understand how the researcher’s own political, theoretical and methodological biases influence the process of analysis. PA^{t}R must be self critical.

Blind or Manipulative Power Dressed Up as Emancipation or Empowerment

There is an argument that in order for PA^{t}R to fulfil its claims of participation, activism, critical inquiry and team process, there should be an emphasis on democratic decision making throughout the project. No matter how well meaning or intended, sometimes attempts to ‘empower’ may come across as patronising or suffocating (Ellsworth 1992). It is possible to ‘disempower’ participants through the use of patronising language or exclusionary processes, sometimes without even knowing it. Contrary to this, PA^{t}R creates the conditions for all involved to be social change agents. In reference to PAR, Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) write:

> Theorizing participatory action research requires articulating and-to an extent-formalizing, what is implied when participants in a social setting decide to take the construction and reconstruction of their social reality into their own hands, knowing that they are not alone in constructing and reconstructing it, but nevertheless taking an active, agential role in changing processes of construction of social realities. (pp. 572–573)

PA^{t}R aligns with this assertion. Unlike traditional research, where sometimes the 'researched' is reduced to being passive, inactive or even reactive agents, PA^{t}R is a conscious attempt to act *with* them. For example, this might include empowering teachers and students as researchers to find sustainable solutions to their own problems (Kincheloe 1991; Steinberg and Kincheloe 1998). Despite the rhetoric of 'giving voice' and liberating others, some continue to question the extent to which such research can, in fact, be 'empowering'. As Shackeroff and Campbell (2007) point out, the degree of participation and power that research participants have within the research project can vary. In PA^{t}R, to avoid reproducing a spiral of silence that excludes certain voices, it is important to be aware of the danger of participants deferring to the power and authority of the 'expert'. Unfortunately, as a form of silencing or passive voice, much participatory or liberatory research has retained rights and control over the researched (Bishop 2005; Smith 2005). This is largely a result of academic researchers, who ultimately have the power to determine the way participants are approached and included (or excluded). This holds from the initial stages of the research, right through to final reporting.

Within traditional approaches that enshrined the expert knowledge and institutional authority of the researcher, Czarniawska (2004) cites 'decades of all-knowing anthropological texts that explained the "native ways of being" to the "more developed civilization"' (p. 567). Yet, unbridled enthusiasm, passion and wishful thinking are just as likely to produce similar kinds of 'blind spots' on listening and understanding. These blind spots can lead to decreased participation, oversimplification and even the manipulation or distortion of information from the field. Given the urgency to tell stories of marginalised groups that are so often under-represented in the research literature or stereotyped in the media, the ever-present danger of *ventriloquism* is always lurking when the substance of activist research is represented, for example, through a rhetorical overstatement (or even understatement) of certain claims due to a particular ideological allegiance. However, accurate and inclusive reporting is essential to building credibility and a better understanding of the issue in the wider public sphere, particularly given the tendency to dismiss participatory research if there is a perception of political bias. Thus, it is essential to take the results of the research back to the community at each stage of the action research cycle to ensure that it represents a collaborative approach to knowledge construction.

Despite the obstacles, an empowering approach tends to strike a cord with researchers whose work is informed by principles of social justice. Although a commitment to social justice and action might be shared, the path to achieving it might be different. This means the researcher needs to be aware of the participants' own agendas and be context sensitive. While it is important to celebrate agency, the researcher should be aware of decision-making constraints and opportunities. Grooming or encouraging participants to become 'change agents' when they have the least power in an organisation can be autocratic and cynically manipulative. Based upon their combined years of place-based activism, Fine et al. (2007) problematise 'the long-assumed aim of PAR' of working with participants to analyse

and speak back to power (p. 495). Aware of the imminent danger associated with the politics of location in such research, they argue: 'Speaking back, like inviting "contact" between differently positioned groups, may be an opportunity for radical inclusion but more often degenerates into a contentious scene of exclusion and soul murder' (Painter 1995) (p. 495). With this in mind, it may not be appropriate to empower already powerful groups through research nor may it be appropriate to place powerless groups in dangerous situations in the name of 'empowerment'. These are delicate questions for you as an activist researcher.

Picking up on some of these points, in Chap. 10, you will read about Gregory's 'LEAP' project. This was an action research project undertaken with unemployed young people 'conscripted' into an employment and training programme in Australia. Within the context of this programme, decisions about the production of the curriculum constituted sites of struggle and contestation, which ultimately determined what was learned and accomplished. Here, the credibility of the data collected influenced the research process as Gregory attempted to decentre power in the classroom to reconstruct the relationship between LEAP staff and students. Forced to operate within the margins of his own area of teaching responsibility in a course titled *Work and Personal Effectiveness*, Gregory strived throughout the remainder of his employment contract to put into effect a curriculum that acknowledged the notion of different curricula, and the different histories, experiences and locations of students (Giroux 1994; Martin 2000). Gregory's relationship with the young people was inherently problematic since his dominance was not only sanctioned by the institutional structures in which the students lived and worked but constantly re-inscribed through the advantages conferred upon him at every turn as he 'negotiated' with the young people. He became more and more aware that his attempts to make spaces for agency available to those hitherto seen as passive or obstructive could simply decompose into another way of colonising others' experiences. As he reflected on his practice, he discovered that he would seemingly defer to the young people and solicit their ideas and opinions as he sought to have them comply with the requirements of the course. On his part, this was a genuine effort at 'empowering' the young people. However, he concluded he was simply fostering the illusion of choice and that, in being mindful of how he enacted his power in the classroom, he was 'negotiating' a more powerful position for himself (Mills 1997).

Partiality, Fluidity and Complexity

As with any research, certain politics or epistemological positions are foregrounded and others backgrounded. Regardless of which theoretical frameworks, positions and methods used, there will always only be a partial representation of reality, and so it is vital that we constantly ask 'from which position do we speak?' and how can we work reflexively to ensure a less oppressive reading of, and participation in, our world as a result of the research. This 'reality' is also contextualised and so may be fluid, or constantly changing. Therefore, recognising the complexity and fluidity of

the context and perhaps even the question/s acts as a reminder to be open for multiple and sometimes even contradictory outcomes. One characteristic of this type of research is that it is often difficult to make fixed, simplistic and unitary statements about project outcomes without asking another barrage of questions. The key is not to allow the process to become suffocating for all involved. For example, reflecting on her plans for a project about the transition of students from the end of primary schooling into secondary or middle schooling, lisahunter says:

> As with the LEAP project in Chap. 10, the Transitions project is rooted in critical theory, feminist theory and the work of transgressive educators as the team works to shift the balance of power and curriculum construction from a few adults (year 7 and 8 teachers) to the students. Our initial plans did not foreground the experiences of teachers or parents, but in recognizing this, perhaps one of the changes we would make would be to include these people a lot more. It is also important for us to realize that the experiences of the cohort of final year Primary students, that is, how they are positioned within the school and how they positioned each other, is dynamic and potentially very different to the cohorts they will become a part of in year 8 (their first year in secondary or middle school). And again, the next year 7 cohort will be equally complex and different, although they will all experiencing ‘transition’. We must be aware that these ‘events’ are very complex and although we cannot fully capture and represent everyone’s experiences we can, through the PA^{t}R process, begin to have a clearer understanding of the process and a more relevant and inclusive attempt to learn through transition, rather than just have it ‘done’ to the students.

Focus

Methods of inquiry that do not foreclose findings as being ‘in support of’ or ‘providing evidence against’, as may be found within the positivist tradition, have the potential to grow beyond a form that is both manageable or focused enough to be able to say anything. In order to ‘keep on track’ without becoming so fixed in the process that reflexivity cannot occur, it is important to return to the question/s (issue/problem) that generated the research action and ensure that micro and macro phases of the cycles act to help answer the question/s. That is not to say that other questions will not be generated. Rather than ignore other possibilities as they arise in this way, PA^{t}R’s reflexivity might call for a redesigning of the question/s based upon the outcomes of a cycle of action. In this way, PA^{t}R remains informed through practice and theory. Systematic field text construction, theory and rigorous planning should still inform the next cycle of action.

Winners and Losers

The point of PA^{t}R is to recognise oppressive situations within your context and attempt to change the context to ensure more socially just outcomes for those participating in the project. It is important to remember though that there are

always winners and losers. For example, some participants may be positioned very powerfully in the status quo, and it might be necessary for that positioning to be changed to allow for a more equitable space for those oppressed by the current practices. For example, in the planning for lisahunter's transitions project, she found that some of the very technically oriented teachers were not supportive of developing an alternate year 8 curriculum. These teachers believed that they knew what was best for the primary students. They positioned primary students as essentially the little fish in a big pond and beginners in the knowledge stakes and characterised by many deficits. As these teachers came from a dominant position of subject experts and secondary (as opposed to primary) school, they had much to lose if they agreed to the project's transition curriculum as it did not introduce the new year 8 students to the basics of their subject areas. In other words, these teachers were in a powerful position within the status quo and were not open to questioning that status quo in the interests of the wider group.

What is important to note is that with change in practice, there will also be a change or redirection of power for some individuals or collectives. You may be surprised that even what seems to be a small and undeniably beneficial change may stir up power, ownership and resistance issues. Perhaps the person who developed the current policy on hand washing on the ward is still on staff and feels slighted by the suggested changes! You must be aware of the internal politics of your context and ready for (as much as you can predict) the resultant implications while working to subvert current positions and argue for a more equitable positioning of participants with a more positive eventual outcome or cultural wealth for all involved.

Reflecting on Limitations and Cautions

In sum, the PA^{t}R process ought not be rushed as changes in attitudes and practice inevitably take time (Tripp 1996). Given the challenges of conducting high quality PA^{t}R, it might also involve seeking out and actively listening to advice and guidance from critical friends, mentors, academic advisors and peer validation groups (McNiff and Whitehead 2000). This process of consultation and negotiation requires a degree of openness and flexibility, particularly when you are challenged about certain assumptions or when weaknesses are identified. The multiple cycles, or spirals, of PA^{t}R are relatively complicated and require a great deal of patience. With this in mind, there is always the possibility that initial plans might shift due to unforeseen circumstances. Unfortunately, new practitioners' learning through PA^{t}R is often compromised because of the rush to initiate projects, particularly for those learning the new profession and/or PA^{t}R in order to accommodate funding schedules, political cycles or the semester system. This means they often read texts such as this one and then go through the motions (the obligatory cycles) but do not engage fully with the complexity of the process including problems or issues that might arise during the conduct of the research. Pre-service professionals are in particular danger if

under the pressure of semester timelines, professional practice placements and course work requirements. They can be reduced to what Jones and Stanley (2011) refer to as 'players of the action research game' in a way that does not reflect real-world practice beyond the pre-service coursework (p. 231). However, notwithstanding these issues, we suggest that pre-service professionals still have a great deal to gain from experimenting with PA^{t}R as it provides them with the opportunity to collaborate with others, to learn from and revise their practice at an entry level, and to become more cognizant of the practices and processes, including the difficulties, limitations and cautions. The next chapter offers a starting point for such practice in the form of an entry level checklist.

Guiding/Clarifying Questions

1. What are some of the significant limitations and difficulties in working with PA^{t}R, particularly in your own context?
2. What relationships and processes are important to be mindful of when engaging in PA^{t}R?
3. Collaborative, emancipatory, oppressive, equitable, exploitative and participatory activist are all ways of describing research/project relationships. What practices and processes would illustrate each of these and which do PA^{t}R aim to achieve?
4. What forms of power, implicit or explicit, must you be cautious of throughout the PA^{t}R project and what ways can you ensure they are constantly monitored, discussed and dealt with?
5. What forms of power might you need to be mindful of given your own subjectivity and position in the project?
6. What is the difference between criticising and employing CT?
7. What processes or practices would illustrate projects that might be described as legitimating, replicating, challenging or reconstructing?
8. How might managerialism and neo-liberalism affect cultural professionals and PA^{t}R projects?
9. What forms of 'voice' are important in the PA^{t}R project and why?
10. What are the cautions associated with voice, agency and meaning-making?
11. How might a PA^{t}R project be mindful of partiality, fluidity and complexity?

Extending Your Reading

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Chapter 9
A Checklist for Activist Research(ers)

Section C: Going public

- Difficulties, limitations, cautions
- **Checklist for activist researchers**
- Example: LEAP
- Examples in professional fields
- Presenting research for audience

This chapter is a checklist that seeks to act only as a starting point. It should be read alongside the details in the related chapters:

- Chapter 5 Methodology of activism in research
- Chapter 6 Methods of constructing field texts
- Chapter 7 Methods of analysing field texts to make research texts
- Chapter 12 Presenting your research for an audience or 'going public'

This chapter will take you, rather simplistically, through a process of your activist research project. It takes you all the way from the starting point of just thinking about it through the project itself including writing it and presenting it in a public forum. Chapter 12 will then give you more detailed guidance in writing up the research. Each section that follows consists of a checklist with some '!tips and cautions'.

Firstly, we cannot overemphasise this….

!Tip/Caution:
Please do not see this step-by-step guide as an invitation to reduce PA^{t}R to a simplistic formula. PA^{t}R is not just something that is 'implemented' in a top-down and linear way. David Tripp (1996) warns of the 'bullet method' (or bullet

lisahunter et al., *Participatory Activist Research in the Globalised World: Social Change Through the Cultural Professions*, Explorations of Educational Purpose 26,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4426-4_9, © Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2013

point approach) that replaces the reader's participation, learning and construction of knowledge with a task-centred approach that is decontextualised, oversimplified, superficial and fragmented (p. 7). The bullet points we provide in this book are only to refer to if you lose focus and/or need help to manage some of the complexity of the process. The list of points looks neat and controlled, but they should not get in the way of you developing a cautious, reflexive and holistic approach that embraces the messy, iterative and generative character of PA^{t}R. Catering for a diversity of contexts, PA^{t}R is concrete, responsive, innovative, critical and emergent.

The sections are:

- Who is involved? Forming the 'team'.
- What is the purpose and focus of the project?
- What is the puzzling business of our research question?
- How can we work ethically and meet formal institutional ethics requirements?
- How do we understand what is currently going on? Reconnaissance and constructing initial field texts.
- What is going to be our focus? Reflecting on reconnaissance field texts.
- What is the project? Turning your research puzzle/question into a project.
- What does cycle one look like?
    - Plan
    - Act
    - Observe
    - Reflect
- What do we do after cycle one? On to cycle two….
- How will we know when to stop?
- How do we manage ending the project? Exits and conclusions.
- How do we disseminate our findings? Writing about the research.

Tips and Cautions

!This is a generic plan for PA^{t}R. You might choose to add, extend or miss sections according to your purpose.

!This chapter may look rather long, but fear not. A thousand-mile journey and all that ….

!*One more reminder*: As PA^{t}R is complex and reflective, your own thousand-mile journey may take twists and turns you just cannot imagine, and that are not easy to imagine when confronted with a neat checklist.

Who Is Involved? Forming the Team Through Trust, Participation and Communication

Hopefully by now, you understand that group or teamwork based upon dialogue is important to participatory research. Participatory approaches that open a critically reflexive space for interaction and dialogue expand the knowledge and awareness of the problem to enable joint and effective action. Nurturing a group or team that reflects the diversity of the site or ‘learning community’ you are working with will ensure that you create a context in which everyone can participate in the research. With a focus on alternative ways of knowing, doing and being, the PA^{t}R process is concerned with incorporating multiple knowledges and interests. Clearly, it is not a straightforward or easy task to incorporate diverse personalities, backgrounds, skills and knowledges. Simply stated, diversity and uncertainty need to be embraced to increase the overall knowledge and awareness of a situation. This means starting ‘where people are’ through dialogical problem-posing, using their own experiences and voices (Stringer 1996, p. 23). Remember, you need to throw any traditional assumptions of what it means to be a researcher out the window. You are not an expert but rather, as Ernest Stringer (1996) puts it, ‘… a resource person’ (p. 22). But where we differ from Stringer is that you are not merely a ‘facilitator or consultant who acts as a catalyst to assist stakeholders’ (p. 22). Instead, you must provide some structure, direction and leadership in creating the conditions for problem-posing dialogue. For example, this can be achieved by asking participants why they have certain concerns and encouraging those who make statements that have some emancipatory potential to take such positions to their logical conclusions (Katz 1991). Conversely, while you are able to strengthen such emancipatory discourses, you can also present counter-arguments to those discourses that could be classified as openly racist, sexist, or homophobic. You too as a researcher must be vulnerable and open to critique. All in all, PA^{t}R is not for the faint hearted.

You might form a team before you identify your interest or you may identify your interest before you form your team, or the two might come together at the same time. Who gets to ‘count’ in terms of the research project is very political. For instance, even ‘doing’ research can be seen as harmful by some groups. Linda Smith (1999) points out that research has been experienced by many First Nation groups as a dehumanising process of measurement, categorisation and racialisation making research itself ‘probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary’ (p. 1). Whatever your context, your enthusiastic identification of an ‘issue’ and a research project to address that issue may be experienced by others as disrespectful, colonising, paternalistic, individualistic or aggressive. It may be vital to have many conversations with the local community (whether it is a staff group, management team, student group, community group and so on), over a long term of relationship development and trust building, before identifying the issue.

Your task is to be aware of who might be approached, included and negotiated with. Who this will be will depend on your context and your purpose. You will also need to be aware of the possible responses to your ideas for research from defensiveness and suspicion to enthusiasm.

So, ask yourself these questions – and try to make sense of them collectively!

- Who are 'we'?
- What is our interest in this project?
- What is our purpose?
- Who will be interested in what we learn?
- How will we disseminate our learning?
- What are our working guidelines (who will do what and when?)

Tips and Cautions

!When forming your team, you will also need to consider whether your team will include 'clients' or only 'workers'. For example, if you are a teacher, will students be on the team too? When thinking about *who* is on the team, think not only about who they are, but who/what they represent. So, for example, Mary might represent union interests, Abdul represents client interests, Ravi represents the ward attendants, John represents nurses and Inge represents the doctor's interests. Cast your net wide when brainstorming – who could possibly be affected by this situation? You may not end up with all these interests represented on the team, but it is wise to think it through.

!As above, PA^{t}R emphasises an *ideal* of full participation in the research of all the stakeholders in the research context. We also recognise that this is not always possible and, indeed, not always desirable. However, do remember, whenever we refer to 'you' in this book, we mean '*the team*'.

!Also, you will need to balance the needs of the project and the constitution of the team, for example, some voices might be better gathered as a consultation to the team or a submission rather than having a member on the team itself. Sometimes, it is politic in terms of the context to *ask* whether a particular group has anything to submit to the project, even if you are pretty sure the answer is no – for example, check in with the school janitor and the parents and friends group whether your plan to reorganise the paper recycling system will affect them in any way … they may say no, it may be helpful to them, or they may have pertinent and important advice.

In some situations, the team is constituted for you; you have no say in the matter. For example, if you are completing a PA^{t}R as an accrediting procedure (e.g. in a university professional preparation course), you may be the team, or you may be partnered with peers. In such a case, you may be in a context to turn to your professional mentor for advice or participation.

!As with all things PA^{t}R, you need to be flexible, and it is up to you to exercise informed professional judgement in that flexibility. But, remember, the kind of activist research we are describing and encouraging here in this book is about the use of direct and mindful action. This is very different to being an advocate for a group or local community, which might involve arguing in favour of something, such as a cause, idea or policy.

What Is the Purpose/Issue/Problem and Focus of the Project

Ask yourself: What are the key questions and ideas, that is, what is it in our context that is concerning us? You will have assembled as a team for a reason, what is that reason?

- Relate it to your own work (ensure it is something you can have an impact on).
- Read enough to have a sense of the issues in the field and locate your issue or problem, and become informed about that issue or problem. Someone else may have already answered the question but in a different context or at a different time or under a different set of circumstances.
- Use brainstorming to target a specific issue, generate ideas, re-examine them as options and eliminate and modify ideas.
- Employ mindmapping to generate, visualise, structure and classify ideas.
- Write a carefully crafted statement of your issue, assumption, hunch, hypothesis, question or problem.

Driven by an iterative process that harnesses the collective knowledge and interests of the participants, David Tripp (1996) suggests that it is important to find a project topic that is 'worthwhile and doable' (pp. 99–100). Topic choice is important because of the commitment involved by all the participants in the research process. It may seem somewhat negative at first as you are starting out by identifying a 'problem'. But the point is, you are identifying it in order to improve the situation. Reconceptualising a negative situation, while both pragmatic and generative, is only one way of making a start. Tripp suggests setting aside some time to generate a list of possibilities and discussing these with the input of the wider group in order to prioritise the five most preferred ideas (p. 100). Ideally, issues or themes will emerge from the creative input of the participants themselves so that they relate meaningfully to their lifeworld contexts. This is closely aligned to Paulo Freire's (1972, 1993) iterative process of exploratory analysis to develop what he called 'generative themes'. This does not mean you cannot discuss or contribute your own ideas, but these will not be imposed in a top-down way (Blikstein 2002). Rather, they should respond to the identified interests or concerns of the group and promote ongoing dialogue, planning, action and evaluation. You will be surprised at how quickly a list is generated and how it can take you down some unexpected and interesting pathways. To help you get started, Tripp suggests making two columns. On the left-hand side, write some starting points from the list below. On the right side, write any ideas each one triggers.

Starting points could include:	Ideas……..
• Follow an interest. • Investigate a situation: ○ Yourself ○ Other people's ideas ○ Things	

◦ Events ◦ Contexts ◦ Relationships • Invent a variation. • Repeat a success. • Critique something. • Create pleasure. • Clarify unclear situations, aims or outcomes. • Change a routine. • Implement a proven idea. • Modify a technique. • Assure quality outcomes. • Face problems: ◦ Accept a challenge. ◦ Overcome a difficulty. ◦ Find/improve a situation. ◦ Learn from a failure. ◦ Resolve a dilemmas.	

Some specific ideas we came up with after doing this exercise included:

- How can we personalise our work to meet the diverse needs of our clients?
- How can the development of a physical space be used to enhance collaborative work between staff?
- What life experiences of our students can enhance and be connected to our curriculum?
- How can we increase the collaborative effectiveness of youth-based decision making in our local community?
- How can patient suffering be reduced through enhancing entry procedures?
- Who needs to be involved in the care of the elderly in our township to ensure respectful ageing?
- When do caregivers and professionals need to work together to help people with mental disabilities become ‘home leavers’?

David Tripp (1996) developed the following criteria for narrowing the possibilities:

- Can it be an action inquiry project (what kind of action can be taken and what kind of inquiry processes can be employed)?
- Is it ‘doable’ (in terms of time, resources, expertise, other participants, for both action and inquiry processes)?
- Is it of sustaining/sustainable interest and concern to the participant(s)?
- What anticipated outcomes (for whom?) would make it worthwhile? (p. 100)

Tips and Cautions

!Some of the reading you do now will go into your literature review. Your initial reading is likely to be very broad and to lead to other reading you had not initially considered as you explore and then refine your research focus. As you refine your focus, you will become more selective in your reading. You are aiming for a deep knowledge, relevant to your specific interest/problem.

There is an infinite range of reasons you may be undertaking this project: as a university project for assessment purposes; a team-building exercise in a human resources department; a work team hoping to reduce needle-stick injuries on a hospital ward; a work team aiming to improve outcomes for clients, be they students or customers or participants in the community garden scheme …; and so on.

Writing the crafted statement of your problem can be simple or daunting – do not get hung up on it. Start by just getting it down in a simple 'work-in-progress' paragraph, it can always be refined as you go along.

What Is the Puzzling Business of the Research Question?

Finding and then refining a specific research *question* can be difficult. Expect to spend some time drafting, redrafting and refining. It is time well spent. You may even redraft and refine while the project is underway! You may start out with a very clear idea of the issue at hand, and the defined research question, or you may only get a firmer sense of the research question itself *after* your reconnaissance phase. That is, you have a hunch that something is going on, and it is in the reconnaissance that you confirm (or not), refine and clarify that hunch.

Your research question, particularly in more formal academic or workplace contexts, should be clearly structured and phrased, try to ensure that it cannot be misinterpreted and pay obsessive attention to the wording and the grammar as you refine it. Chapter 12 will give you more guidance in writing the question.

Your research question captures the what, how and why of the project.

What – what do we want to improve
How – the action that we will take
Why – the social justice driver

Make Sure Your Research Question Is:

- Specific and focused
- Action oriented
- Related to the various dimensions or elements of your problem/issue
- Open, that is, it should invite investigation and reflection and lead to complex, detailed responses

You may find that it is neither useful nor necessary to restrict and narrow your project to a research *question* as such. You may find that you are better to play with a *research puzzle* (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). Jean Clandinin and John Connelly found, as many researchers have, that the formulation of a research question was more constraining than useful. Hence, they introduced the notion of a puzzle. A research puzzle is a formulation of your interest in terms of what you wonder about the situation; it is characterised by a sense of searching. You may choose to focus your thinking by formulating a puzzle *en route* to a more specific and focussed question. Chapter 12 includes examples of both research questions and research puzzles.

Tips and Cautions

!Print out your research question or puzzle, and keep it on display to keep you on track. It is VERY easy to go off on interesting (and often important) tangents – keep those tangential ideas for the next project or the next cycle.

How Can We Work Ethically and Meet Formal Institutional Ethics Requirements?

In Chap. 4, we made the point that ethics are an important consideration both when getting your head around your philosophy (ontology, epistemology and ethics) and when managing some of the administrative protocols. The context in which you work will have particular ethics protocols. For instance, universities have a process that requires researchers to secure ethics approval by documenting their project for a review board. Even if you are undertaking PA^{t}R as part of a university degree, your university will have guidelines and paperwork for you to complete. The review board makes judgements about the research and, if it endorses your research, provides guidelines for your conduct as a university researcher. Other institutions such as government agencies should also have some form of ethics guidelines and processes that you will need to complete. Your first concern is to find out what institutional guidelines are available and what processes are required for you to begin the research.

There is also something beyond review boards and institutional requirements. Many research methodologies speak to ethical conduct, that is, ways of working ethically. The ethical considerations you face will depend upon your own research position and the philosophical and methodological orientations of the team and participants. Consult with a supervisor or mentor as well as other project participants to find out how to understand and access information about working ethically. There is also a lot of information online that informs working ethically, particularly with inputs from those doing indigenous research and feminist research.

As a start, your team might ask:

- What are the ethics implications of our question, and how have we considered them in the activist research process?

- Have we completed the ethics administration necessary in our institution or field including:
  - Permission letters
  - Informed consent
  - Information sheets
- Have we negotiated with all other possible interested people or groups (administrators/managers/authorities, ethics committees, participants, parents/supervisors)?

Tips and Cautions

!Technical and administrative considerations are important – VERY – but remember too that within PA^{t}R, your concern for ethical conduct reaches *beyond* the paperwork to consider questions such as:

- How do our actions and decisions affect others?
- Who wins and who loses if we do this research?
- Who wins and who loses if we do not do this research?
- Whose voice is legitimised in our research and whose is silenced?
- Who has not been consulted?
- Are our actions empowering or imposing?
- Is a marginalised group further marginalised by our actions, or empowered and emancipated?
- Who will own the research and research outcomes?
- How will we know if it is a worthwhile project?

As a PA^{t}R project, your ethical basis is *always* to contribute to the struggle for social justice … and if you feel like a very small fish in a very large pond, focus on small contributions, even if it is to one individual. Remember 'from little things, big things grow'.
And if you cannot imagine even a small contribution, let your motto be

!do no harm!

How Do We Understand What Is Currently Going On?

Reconnaissance and Constructing Initial Field Texts in the Given Context

You may already know a little bit about the situation. Adopting a tactical/strategic approach, PA^{t}R will enable you (as a team) to find out more in a more systematic and rigorous way. The reconnaissance is your opportunity to gain an understanding of the context and the situation, to construct the field texts necessary to refine your research question or puzzle and to plan the first cycle of intervention. The reconnaissance will help you to make connections between the personal and activist/professional

and to make an informed choice about your topic. This phase is where you turn your hunch and/or the themes or ideas identified by the participants themselves into a research question or puzzle. As a team, ask:

- What do we need to know about the current situation (before we take any action)?

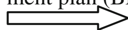
  And then decide:

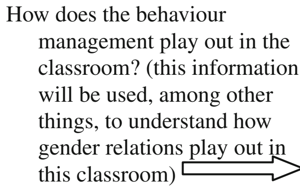
- What methods and instruments will we use to gather these reconnaissance field texts (see Chap. 6):
  - Field notes
  - Observation schedules
  - Context maps
  - Tables and checklists
  - Diaries
  - Anecdotal records
  - Surveys/questionnaires
  - Interviews
  - Stories/narrative inquiry
  - Critical incidents
  - Documents
  - Ideology critique
  - Participant logs and journals
  - Focus groups
  - Narrative accounts
  - …

For example, say I have a sense that the power relations in my classroom are perpetuating a form of gender relations that disadvantage some students. I have a sense that the behaviour management plan in place in this school is playing in to this power dynamic. How will I generate field texts to inform me further – that is, how will I follow up on this hunch?

What do I want to find out?

The relationship between the way the school behaviour management plan is acted out in this classroom and the power dynamics in the form of gender relations in this classroom

What will I need to know?	*How will I find out?*
What is the behaviour management plan (BMP)? 	Document collection – school plan, classroom plan, classroom charts, etc., evaluation documents (e.g. do teachers or administrators keep any records of students on 'time out') Teacher interview – about her/his understanding and enactment of the school BMP in the classroom Student interviews – about the BMP and how it is employed in their school

 How does the behaviour management play out in the classroom? (this information will be used, among other things, to understand how gender relations play out in this classroom)	Classroom observation schedule to see how the classroom functions How often will we observe – several key periods of time a day? How long would those periods be and when (e.g. a transition points between lessons, moving in and out of class, during direct teaching phases of lessons, during quiet work phases of lessons) What will be observed – for example, who asks questions, who gives answers, who is disciplined, who acts out, what counts as misbehaviour and for whom, what sort of punishments are offered, what sorts of rewards, to whom. Devise a schedule that captures this information easily

Tips and Cautions

!Remember: Review Chaps. 6 and 7 if you have lost track of the distinction between *field texts* and *research texts*. In short, field texts are information you have gathered from the research site. A research text is your *analysis* of that information. In a sense, field texts are raw, for example, the checklist, the pile of surveys, the photocopies of work samples or patient charts. Research texts are your analysis of that raw information.

!It is easy to aim high and plan to collect a lot of information about your research site. That is an excellent place to start. Brainstorm wildly about the sorts of field texts that might be relevant, and then refocus on your topic or question as a way of helping you figure out what information is relevant to you right now. Follow hunches … now is the time to gather information rather than wish you had done so when it is too late. Do not forget to involve the participants as co-researchers who are invaluable sources of expertise and knowledge, particularly about the local setting.

!Remember to ask ethical questions of your information gathering methods, for example, is a survey the most ethically sensitive method to gather the information you need, or will that serve to give voice to some ways of knowing and silence others. What would be the ethical implications of gathering participants stories (e.g. gaining trust, spending time, anonymising)

What Is Going To Be Our Focus? Reflecting on Reconnaissance Field Texts

When you have constructed the reconnaissance field texts, you need to deliberate together over what they are telling you.

- Consider proximity of knowing (biases, contextual knowledge, attitudes; see Chaps. 3, 4 and 5).

- Present the data as a coherent report of the context so that you can plan your first cycle.
- Revisit your research question/puzzle – refine these as necessary.
- Read literature in the relevant fields to understand how others have addressed this problem before and to inform your planning.
- Discuss the field texts, issues that have arisen and the planning within and beyond the team: Ask each other on the team, ask a critical friend, ask colleagues and family … What conclusions do we agree or disagree about? What have we have left out? What seems most special and important?
- Revisit your ethical considerations and ensure you have integrity to your ethical commitments.

Tips and Cautions

!As you reflect on you reconnaissance field texts, you might well decide that you have too much information, or not enough! You might decide you have asked the wrong question. This should be a lively time of discussion and debate amongst the team as you try to get a grip on what really is going on as best as you can tell. Do not feel that things have stagnated while this debate goes on – as long as the conversations are taking place, then the project is moving along. Invest a little time to get clarity before you move on.

The reconnaissance will inform your action. That is why reconnaissance is pivotal. It is from your understanding of the field (through the research literature) and your particular context (through your reconnaissance) that you develop a plan of action.

What Is the Project? Turning Your Research Question/Puzzle into a Project

Having considered what your reconnaissance field texts are telling you about the context and your question/puzzle, you need to engage in this very practical step.

- As a team, again ask yourselves:
  - What do we want to find out?
  - What will we need to know?
  - How will we find that out?

Tips and Cautions
!This is a very practical phase of your planning. Work together to answer these questions in simple terms. The following sections will help you turn your answers into action.

What Does the First Cycle Look Like? Plan, Act, Observe and Reflect

Each cycle consists of iterative phases of planning, acting, observing and reflecting.

Plan

- Ask: What does our reconnaissance suggest as a possible intervention?
- Ask: What does the literature in the field suggest as an intervention given what we learned in the reconnaissance?
- Plan the intervention

  Check: Is the action:

  - Reflective? That is, based on careful review of data and literature.
  - Deliberative? That is, aimed at particular positive outcome.
  - Just? That is, careful not to harm or discriminate against anyone, for the best interests of all concerned.

- Consider your timeline: What timelines are you working within?
- Decide the criteria you will use to judge the impact of your action.
- Plan the field texts, and negotiate the instruments you will use to gather those field texts and prepare them (these may include the following: surveys, observation checklists, journals, field notes, interview schedules and so on (see Chap. 6)).
- Gather resources for the intervention. These will be human resources and material resources, everything from pencils and paper and the necessary technologies to the people who will carry out the interventions and construct the field texts.
- Determine a finite moment, that is, ask, 'How will we know when this cycle of intervention is complete?' Your time constraints may have impact on this.

Act

- Carry out the intervention.
- Monitor the intervention throughout (using the field text methods and instruments you devised in the planning phase).
- Monitor the justice implications of your intervention as it unfolds.

Observe

- Create field texts as you implement the action.
- Keep a researcher journal that acts as initial reflections on the field texts, actions and methods of observation.
- Organise your field texts as you create them use folders or boxes or computer files.
- Store the field texts safely, either in locked cabinets or password-protected files on your computer.

Reflect (and Revise)

As the intervention progresses, and then upon completion of the first cycle of intervention:

- ◦ Consider what the field texts are telling you about the problem, connecting it to your question. That is, analyse the field texts to create research texts (see Chap. 7)
- ◦ Consider how the research texts and findings relate to what the literature says about the research problem and questions.
- ◦ Identify gaps in findings that call for further investigation.
- ◦ Consider the trustworthiness of the findings (e.g. biases and field text creation inconsistencies).
- ◦ Reconsider all ethics implications.
- ◦ Revisit all justice principles.
- ◦ Refine your problem and question if the evidence indicates this is appropriate.

Tips and Cautions

!When considering timelines, you may have parameters imposed from all sorts of external forces, from when the report is due to the availability of participants.

!Do not panic if the circumstances of the context change, and this forces you to change your plan – this may well happen; be sure to make a note of changes in your research journal, and write about this in the reflection phase as well as the final report.

!What counts as cycle one? If you have an intervention bordered by time, for example, a 6-week unit of work in school, the question about what counts as cycle one will be an easy one to answer. Sometimes, however, there is a fluid answer to this question; if you are implementing a new routine, you need it to be in place long enough for the novelty factor to wear off to determine whether the new routine has in fact become routine and *then* determine its effect. Or, if implementing a new protocol, say, for example, a new hand washing protocol on your hospital ward or in your child care facility, you need it to be consistently in place long enough to determine whether it is having the effect you hoped (say, fall in transmission of infection). Clearly and explicitly discuss all these factors within your team, and document them in your report to make a strong case for why you have worked within the particular parameters.

!Do not underestimate the importance of routinely collecting information and organising it; you will be very grateful for your diligence when it comes time to reflect and revise and to write up your report.

!When something out of the ordinary happens, you think you will remember it – but it is just as likely that you will not – so document it as soon as possible, even if it is just some scrawled notes on the back of a chip wrapper (that get stuck into your research journal asap!). Routinely filing such information in one place or entering it into a journal is an important habit to foster.

What Do We Do After Cycle One?

Plan cycle two based on the evidence and understanding from cycle one and ongoing reference to the literature. And so on….

Act ….
Observe ….
Reflect …..
Cycle three ….
Cycle four ….

How Will We Know When To Stop?

Like knowing when cycle one is complete, knowing when to stop will vary according to the parameters of the project. It is worthwhile discussing and acknowledging such parameters up front. Identify whether it is:

- When you have achieved a particular result
- When the participants are no longer available

Or even more pragmatically:

- When funding runs out
- When no one continues to drive the project
- When the time is up! Or …
- (Something else you define)

It is important to have some sense of knowing when to stop, even if this changes as the project progresses. This enables an exit strategy, something that often goes unplanned and unacknowledged in its importance.

Tips and Cautions

!Remember, you may have parameters from all sorts of external forces. Often these are not ideal in terms of your project … but that is life!

!Do not panic if the circumstances of the context change, and this forces you to change your cycles or your timeline. This may well happen; be sure to record this during the project in your research journal, and include it in the final report.

How Do We Manage Ending the Project? Exits and Conclusions

!In a sense, participatory activist research is never ‘over’. There will come a time in your project, however, that you stop in the formal sense. At this time, you will think through the actions to make conclusions and draw implications. You would ideally meet with participants and other interested parties at this time too (managers, human resource people, the school principal or centre/service manager and so forth) to discuss and review findings. Your reflection will consider:

- What, who and how have we learnt about the issue/focus/problem?
- What, who and how have we achieved or changed?
- Have we changed our practice and lived out social justice? If so, how?
- Have we had positive impact on the participants in this context and if so, what impact and on whom?
- Is our new practice socially just, is it more just than previously? If so, how and for whom?
- Is our new practice in line with our purported social justice values and goals?
- What have we learnt about the *process* of PA^{t}R that can inform similar projects?
- What would we do differently next time?
- How will we disseminate what we have learnt and to whom?
- For whom is the project over?
- What exit strategies do we need to carry out for those for whom the project is over?
- What do we need to do for those wishing to continue the project?

There are ethical considerations when determining when to stop as there are implications for others, the sustainability of the intervention and the dissemination of the project and its outcomes. Depending on your project, exit strategies might include:

- Participant debriefing or counselling
- Your or the participants physical removal during an uprising
- Research skills workshops so that those staying in the context can continue the cycles without you
- Formally completing contractual obligations in the form of report writing or reporting in person to institutional representatives
- New arrangements to guide relationships beyond the project
- Closing the process with a form of ceremony, celebration, presentation or formal exchange

While there is no single answer as to what the exit strategy should be, it is nevertheless important to consider what it will be when you are planning, and revisit this explicitly within each cycle.

Tips and Cautions

! This is another time for lively conversation – remembering that the real world is messy and does not follow the neat trajectory of a research plan or a checklist. Allow the discussions at this time to range widely as all members of the team grapple with questions above. *Then* focus on how you will answer these questions for *this* project, at *this* time.

How Do We Disseminate Our Findings? Writing About the Research

As will be discussed in more detail in Chap. 12, your team will need to consider the following question:

- What is the purpose of presenting the research?
- Who are you writing for and why? Clarify your audience and purpose.
- What is the most appropriate way to present the research? This will be guided by your first two answers and may require a number of mediums if there are different purposes or audiences.

  Traditional genres could include:

- Report for an institution such as the government or funding body
- Scholarly journal article
- Thesis for university
- Seminar presentation
- Conference presentation
- Participant newsletter
- A new funding application

  Less traditional genres could include:

- Community flyers
- Letterbox drops
- Local community poster
- Shop-a-docket information
- Open learning seminars
- Radio interview
- Television interview
- Media release
- Newspaper article

  New media genres could include:

- Youtube presentation

- Facebook posting
- Blog site for participants
- Twitter postings
- Emails
- SMS prompts
- …

The genre of dissemination may have been determined for you in the planning of the project, but consider too whether there are some other forms of dissemination that might also spread the word to those that would value this information.

Most written forms, particularly those from the traditional group above, will require all or some of these sections, in greater or lesser detail:

- Abstract/executive summary
- Introduction:
  - Focus/issue/problem
  - Research question/puzzle
- Literature review
- Methodology
- Reconnaissance
- Cycle one description:
  - Plan
  - Act
  - Observe
  - Reflect
- Cycle two:
  - Plan
  - Act
  - Observe
  - Reflect
- Cycle three – and so forth
- Findings, discussion and conclusions
- Appendices
- References

These sections are detailed in Chap. 12 with examples. If you are writing for assessment purposes, you will most likely have particular assessment criteria to work with and guide you. Similarly, when using any genre, or communicating to any audience, you need to explore relevant guidelines to aid your process.

Tips and Cautions

!Decide on the most important messages you wish to convey from your findings. Highlight these, making them the focus of the 'story' of your project. If you are having trouble focusing, tell the story of the project and your findings to someone outside the project, or tape yourself telling the project's story.

Conclusion

This checklist chapter is designed to simplistically map out the process and some of the significant sections and questions in doing PA^tR. This chapter is all about guiding and clarifying. Resist the temptation to skip over any of the questions or processes here, give them all some thought, attention and discussion, whether or not they become part of your final project. It is better to have discussed this checklist and explicitly decided to NOT attend to one of the boxes, discussing the implications of this, than to have passed over it and find yourselves having to undo something that might not be undoable. In the next chapter, we illustrate how PA^tR might look in practice.

Guiding/Clarifying Questions

Perhaps the most important guiding or clarifying question at this point is:

- How can we flesh out this simplistic checklist by reading the related chapters and continually revisiting them and the more extensive literature?

Extending Your Reading

There are very many useful books and websites on action research and its relatives. Be aware that we are proposing PA^tR, that is, *activ*ist research. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to PA^tR. We engage with theories and case studies from many different traditions and areas of practice. As a starting point, this book should not be read in isolation from the growing body of writings on participatory and emancipatory research. Whatever other resources you consult, filter what you read through your own decisions about your intent and your political, theoretical, methodological and ideological point of view. To get your reading started, we recommend the following references.

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Chapter 10
LEAPing into Youth Work: PA^{t}R in a Cultural Profession

Section C: Going public

- Difficulties, limitations, cautions
- Checklist for activist researchers
- **Example: LEAP**
- Examples in professional fields
- Presenting research for audience

This chapter provides an example of Gregory's critical engagement with action research approaches. It illustrates the way that power is always already present before you even enter the research space and the way that always already present power can drive the process. This example is not presented here as a perfect example but as a 'best effort' in the given context and one you might use to better understand the practice and its complexities, tensions and contradictions, both in theory and practice. Unfortunately, a tendency exists in some of the reported AR literature to tell stories through compelling exemplars that sentimentalise, romanticise or grossly oversimplify the process and the outcomes. This propensity for simplification or exaggeration may be for personal or political reasons such as presenting sanitised reports in order to win funding or to mobilise allies through partisan rhetoric. However, the danger is that this can lead to naïve, mechanical, distorted or even erroneous understandings of the change process promoted by PA^{t}R.

Aware that such accounts can actually undermine the legitimacy and credibility of action research, Mary Brydon-Miller (2008) argues that honesty is required in acknowledging some of the inherent confusion and uncertainty. She suggests that this will provide the empirical grounding for 'important insights into key ethical challenges' particularly, for example, as researchers attempt '… to engage with

lisahunter et al., *Participatory Activist Research in the Globalised World: Social Change Through the Cultural Professions*, Explorations of Educational Purpose 26,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4426-4_10, © Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2013

issues of power including power differentials between the academic researchers and community participants, and among the community participants themselves' (p. 207). A number of recent articles and books, particularly in the area of critical youth studies and youth participatory action research (Akom et al. 2008), have complicated conventional understandings of action research and provide alternative insights and different tools for activist, participatory inquiry. An apt example is *Revolutionizing Education: Youth Participatory Action Research* by Julio Cammarota and Michelle Fine (2008). What is important to remember is that PA^tR is a hands-on method of 'learning by doing' that often exists far from abstract ideals. In this spirit, Gregory's chapter is a 'warts and all' account of action research mobilised as a means to engage young people in the context of a labour market programme in Australia. It will flesh out the previous chapters in guiding your PA^tR. What follows in this chapter is Gregory's experience.

In the late 1990s, I was employed as a formal training presenter by a community-based employment agency as part of their Landcare and Environmental Action Program (LEAP). The LEAP was a nation-wide labour market initiative funded by the Australian federal labour government in response to persistently high rates of youth unemployment. Set against this backdrop, the LEAPs were designed to provide unemployed youth (aged 16–21) identified as 'at risk' with a pathway to acquire skills, self-esteem and employment. Each 26-week project had a conservation, cultural heritage or environmental theme, and the one in which I was employed was aimed at providing the young people with skills in making recycled products. The site of the LEAP was a youth centre located in a community close to Perth, the capital city of Western Australia. The project included a coordinator, youth support worker and 15 young people.

My role was to facilitate an accredited technical and further education (TAFE) course called *Work and Personal Effectiveness*, approximately 4 h a week over a 17-week period. The young people were referred to the LEAP by the former Commonwealth Employment Service (CES), a federal government agency, responsible for providing free labour market assistance to all Australians registered as unemployed. The CES and other government and non-government agencies actively sought to recruit volunteers from the eligible target groups. Contrary to these protocols of identification and solicitation (as foregrounded in public relation materials such as flyers and websites), I learned during my research that some of the young people felt they had been pressured to participate.[1] Certainly, under the direction of CES staff, the young people were concerned that a refusal to participate would result in suspension of their unemployment benefits. Given this situation, these 'conscripts' were resentful of having to complete the course and expressed their anger and frustration in different forms of 'active' and 'passive' resistance (McLaren

[1] It should be pointed out that this was prior to the introduction in Australia of a 'mutual obligation' policy, which introduced the idea of compulsion and a regime of penalties for those who did not participate in Work for the Dole (unemployment benefit) programmes or other approved activities.

1986). Seriously grappling with my own contradictory positioning, I decided to undertake action to improve the learning environment for these students. The result was far from a clinical case study in action research. In the following, I provide a brief account of an action research cycle as I sought to engage the LEAP students as part of a Bachelor of Education action research unit I completed as a student in Western Australia (Martin 2000).

Reconnaissance

Background

Despite the joy of having landed a teaching job at the employment centre, one stressful event that still stands out is when a student stood up in the first day of class, kicked over a chair and yelled 'this is fucked' (Craig, LEAP participant). Compounding my anxiety about teaching in front of a new group of students, I felt an immediate sense of dread and failure, as this was definitely not the way it was meant to be. Despite or perhaps even as a result of my initial shock, I proceeded by ignoring the student's disruptive behaviour, at which he rather angrily returned to his chair. After sweating it out until the class had formally ended, I asked the student to explain what was wrong. Regarding his outburst, the student told me that he was frustrated about a situation in his personal life and the constraint of the LEAP classroom had only added to his frustration and despair. Taking seriously into account his feelings and opinions, I engaged in a number of informal conversations with staff and students. What emerged most clearly, to my disappointment, was that LEAPs were often characterised by acts of what Peter McLaren (1986) terms 'active' and 'passive' resistance. In this respect, my previous experience working with adult learners in literacy and numeracy did not prepare me for the LEAP classroom. Generally speaking, the majority of my students in the adult literacy and numeracy teaching/learning environment were enthusiastic learners, who at least superficially appeared to accept my location in the classroom and the objectives of the course.

Haunted by my own experience of long-term unemployment, my initial recognition of the existence of oppression within the LEAP ignited my desire to understand and change my practice within these 'unjust and unsatisfying social relations'(Kemmis and Wilkinson 1998, p. 35). Although the intensity of negative feedback from participants animated a commitment to social justice, my initial focus was on developing my 'technical' expertise as a way of improving the problematic situation for the students. Less interested in creating the conditions for substantial social change than in establishing a dialogue that would make it possible to improve my technical teaching skills, I was seduced by the need to be an accepted 'professional'. Whether intended or not, this value stance always

threatens to fossilise reform efforts within the ‘political contested spaces’ of the classroom (Kincheloe 2003, p. 5). Having gained approval for your research, it is important to avoid this pitfall as it undercuts critique (e.g. of the interpersonal and structural constraints of the classroom) and in turn tends to produce narrow and predictable forms of action. Despite my naïve stance, however, the project did not produce such a personal or structural outcome. It is very difficult to get people to critically reflect on their values and practices in relation to their work. What emerged, however, is that the recursive and participatory dimensions of the research process brought out the need to recognise and name the underlying value differences and conflicts evident in the LEAP’s practices.

Clearing House: Power and Resistance

Despite being told that the LEAP was for their benefit, a recurring complaint amongst the young people was that they did not have any control over the programme’s activities or content, which formed the official curriculum. It was this contradiction that provided the basis of my action research project. With a focus on professional development, my original intent was to theorise contradictory practices in the programme in ways that opened up a space for dialogue, agency and possibility. But my concept of agency was certainly not well theorised at this point and was overwhelmingly centred on my desire to achieve a degree of stability in the classroom. During my reconnaissance in the first week of class, the young people readily informed me that LEAP staff treated them like children by constantly telling them what to do. As one student stated, ‘this course is shit, they treat us like kids and like where [sic] at school’ (Daniel, LEAP participant).

While I continued to collect and file critical incidents into my diary to confirm what I suspected was happening in the LEAP, I intensified my analysis by completing an ‘ideology critique’ on a taken-for-granted practice in the programme called Clearing House. What captured my notice about Clearing House is that the students’ attitudes and behaviours in my classroom were much worse before and after it. In a chapter that discusses some of the processes of socially reflexive action research and identifies my LEAP project as an example of it, David Tripp (1998) describes ideology critique as ‘an analysis and critical evaluation of assumptions, rationales and actual practices’ (p. 43). As mentioned in Chapter 7, ideology critique is not merely a form of negative or intellectual critique. Rather, it also offers a positive or generative way of focusing theory and action through the demystification of everyday practices. Following Paulo Freire (1993), ideology critique is a practice of critical literacy that entails a ‘reading of world’, in that the process generates change via new ways of thinking and acting about an issue, problem or situation (see Luke and Dooley 2009). In this way, PAR can serve as a vehicle of critical consciousness raising (a process known in Portuguese as conscientização) that empowers participants to question their everyday lived reality, or to critically read the world, and move beyond conventional or common

sense understandings. Given the way ideological critique stimulates questions about the relationship between identity, ideology, language, power and representation, it is also closely aligned with Paulo Freire's (1993) agentive processes of 'naming and renaming' (Luke and Dooley 2009). With the assistance of my critical friend (David Tripp), I used this research method as outlined in Tripp (1993, p. 59) to help me plan new action in the research cycle.

Clearing House: Ideology Critique

What Is Meant to Happen?

Clearing House was generally accepted to be a part of the LEAP programme valuable for resolving conflict. Clearing House was a regular, structured time and space for students, the coordinator and the youth support worker to gather to discuss any issues of concern to the group. The LEAP participants sat in a semi-circle with the coordinator at the front and in the centre of the classroom with the youth support worker to her side. The process of Clearing House began with the coordinator asking the participants if there were any issues or grievances they wished to discuss. Students or staff then raised individual or collective concerns about the LEAP and their place within it. The discussion usually centred on and around issues of concern such as the 'docking' of wages (reductions in welfare payments made by LEAP staff for infractions such as lateness, absences, misbehaviour and so on) and damage to LEAP property including graffiti or other similar complaints from either the LEAP staff or the young people themselves. It was perceived as a time and space in which everyone could argue, take risks and speak and be heard without fear of rejection, ostracism, intimidation or reprisal from either staff or students. It was a time for open and honest dialogue, participation and rethinking the way things were in order to improve the working environment for mutual benefit.

What Does Happen?

First, I think it is important to note that I grounded my observations and reflections in the shared understandings of the young people. I found that this approach enabled me to transcend the individual pathologies fostered by the LEAP staff who, knowingly or not, used this structured time and space to enforce their own authority, values, rules and regulations. For example, staff imposed their own authority by penalising and silencing students through their own interpretation of events, which did not acknowledge the lived experiences and locations of students. Students were encouraged to share their opinions, but LEAP staff retained the ultimate authority for enforcing the norms for interaction and arbitrating disputes. Indeed, they often made final decisions with little consideration (and often in contradiction) to the accepted concerns, views and needs of the students as rights holding citizens, with

much to offer. While some students felt that Clearing House was useful for solving conflict, it was still a frustrating and disconcerting experience:

> Clearing House is good. It helps to sort any problems between the participants and coordinators. The only problem is that people go defensive and there is a yelling contest. In Clearing House you need to be able to look at a situation from both sides and listen to each other. I think there is probably a lot of participants that are annoyed, but are too scared to say something because they are worried that they are going to get yelled at and the problems gets worse e.g. the amount of damage done to the centre. Certain participants are not respecting the property. You don't say anything because they don't care or listen and they continue to run the course for the other participants. (Anne, LEAP participant)

On the other hand, a student who felt Clearing House was 'a waste of time' responded with the following:

> Clearing House is basically rubbish because while we get to say what we think, the decision has already been made by the counsellors who very rarely compromise and reverse their decisions even less, no matter how the entire group feels or however good our argument is. (Andrew, LEAP participant)

Put simply by one student:

> It's good to get our problems heard, but they always have the last word.
> (Alan, LEAP participant)

As a result of this, students became frustrated, confused and angry about the way disputes were handled:

> If you know you should get paid and you don't you just get hell pissed off and start yelling and then you get paid and go home. If you get docked for 1/2 hour for being 5 minutes late, that's fucked, and getting kicked out for a week for 5 minutes, that's absolutely fucked. (Nigel, LEAP participant)

Why the Difference?

Clearing House is a practice tied to the maintenance of vested interests and structures of power in capitalist society. Presented as neutral and fair, the crucial emotional, pedagogical and political work of such institutional structures and processes is to socialise students into the dominant ideology in order to produce a disciplined and flexible labour force for employers. Within the context of traditional or formal education or schooling, Lynn Worsham (2001) argues that pedagogical practices applied in the classroom operate to 'maintain and reinforce the reigning social, economic, and political arrangements as legitimate when in fact they are entirely arbitrary' (p. 238). She also suggests that the primary work of this kind of pedagogy is 'to construct an emotional world, to inculcate patterns of feeling that support the legitimacy of the status quo' (p. 238).

Echoing the way young people are routinely portrayed in society, including the media, the policy discourse surrounding young people tends to assume that they are impressionable, naïve, misguided and in need of protection and/or will stigmatise some segments in working class and minority communities as a

'problem', that is potentially embodying trouble or some kind of threat. In this febrile climate, Mike Males (1996) argues youth make convenient scapegoats for many of the ills of society. The response of the state is to develop programmes such as LEAP that are based on a deficit model designed to help young people achieve their aspirations by teaching practical life and social skills, even when the economy cannot fully accommodate them. Regardless, successful completion of the course indicated that certain learning objectivities had been achieved, for example, a generalised deference to authority and acceptance of abuse without complaint (Tripp 1998). With an outstretched hand from the paternalistic state, the design and delivery of these labour market transition programmes were construed as meeting the diverse needs of stakeholders (jobseekers, employers, education and training providers, and the state). However, within the LEAP, divergent sets of values and interests were clearly evident. Far from bolstering the self-esteem of the young people, these conflicts in interests and contradictions of process in Clearing House produced a brooding atmosphere of 'them and us' (between LEAP staff and the young people) that inculcated a deep sense of frustration, alienation and despair.

Although Clearing House was posited as an open and democratic social space, the reality was that the dominant and parental discourse of the staff represented a form of exclusionary discourse, which designated some participants as deviant and lacking in rationality (Mitchell 1991). This approach was often successful for the staff who justified it by pointing out their accountability to a higher departmental authority. The result was that students expressed their frustration and anger with the 'system' by shouting, leaving the room, ignoring what was happening or remaining silent. The effect was to divert attention away from the problems of students to problems to do with students themselves. In keeping with this agenda, while staff informally acknowledged problems such as inappropriate referrals, interactively the more senior staff distanced themselves from the young people, if anything tending to blame them for many of their problems. Within this context, I began to speculate that LEAP staff subordinated the wishes of students to the requirements of employers and the government because they were employed to deliver these labour market programmes and wished to achieve their aims to ensure further funding (Martin 2000).

As my review of the research literature made abundantly clear, the existing social order is never indifferent to ideology, which in its negative form invariably serves the private interests of dominant groups including employers and the managers of public institutions such as the former CES (Aronowitz and Giroux 1985; McLaren 1995a). Exemplary of this, Clearing House served as a device of social control by reaffirming the authority and values of the staff and inducing conformity amongst students. These were attributes much valued in an employee by an employer. As David Tripp (1998) puts it, they were achieved through Clearing House because 'it is a way of bringing out the students' anger and frustration so it can be dealt with in such a way that the students either take themselves out of the course (and so further lessen their chances of employment) or they remain in it (becoming more passive and accepting and therefore more suitable as employees') (p. 45). My argument, therefore, was that by regulating and containing the noisy and disruptive discourses

of the young people, LEAP staff made the insertion of 'docile bodies' into a flexible and highly exploitable labour market not only possible but also even *desirable* (Foucault 1977).

Plan

As I engaged LEAP students and staff in a search for an alternative institutional structure, I decided that my first action step would be to reframe the narrative by providing each team or group with opportunities to articulate their positions in order to determine what was known or not recognised (L. Rogers, personal communication). In conjunction with my critical friend, I chose to use a form of triangulation interview with focus groups to obtain a 'fairer' picture of what was happening in the classroom' (Tripp 1996, p. 48).

Act and Observe

After an awkward start, I decided to make myself not only open but also vulnerable to scrutiny. I began by explaining my intentions to all the participants and invited them to break into teams or groups so that they could respond to a series of written questions about their perceptions of Clearing House, myself, LEAP staff and students. Initially, the students divided themselves into three teams. However, these teams soon disbanded with students consolidating themselves into two larger teams or groups: A and B. To deepen the students' involvement in the inquiry process and to ensure that I was not imposing an authoritative claim on what was written, in the second cycle of interviews, the two groups of students and LEAP staff were provided with the opportunity to read and to reply to each other's responses.

Having forged a new course, the responses I received from each group were informative and useful. David Tripp (1996) argues that it is impossible to obtain an 'objective' or 'true' account of what is happening in the classroom (p. 48). For example, I wondered if students would feel that their views would not be valued or be careful with their responses, fearing reprisal from LEAP staff or even myself in this institutional context. In pursuing an approach that is emancipatory, David Tripp (1996, p. 48) observes that triangulation is useful in providing an understanding of each of the group's positions. In this respect, by reviewing the data obtained from the triangulated interviews, it was evident that there were differences of opinion amongst each of the student groups and LEAP staff. Despite these differences, however, Group A and Group B identified the LEAP staff as their primary source of conflict. Group A, when asked about Clearing House and their perceptions of LEAP staff, replied in a very disparaging and gendered way that they '… over

react about the simplest things. Bitches!', while Group B stated that LEAP staff were 'always docking us', 'changing rules' and 'take jokes too seriously'. At times angry and defiant, both of the student groups were frustrated about the ability of LEAP staff to make and change decisions with little or no regard to students. Group A felt powerless to express their concerns in Clearing House:

> These discussions are just plea bargains to get a better deal. The decision has been made prior to discussion with little chance of reversing decision even with group unity. (Respondent from Group A)

In general, I found that the feedback on my practice from the student groups was positive and encouraging. For example, Group B stated that the teacher 'sees things from both sides' and 'suggests ideas to resolve conflict'. Ernest Stringer (1996), it should be noted, argues 'Research facilitators … cannot afford to be associated too closely with any one of the stakeholding groups in the setting' (p. 47). However, I acknowledge that the students might have been hesitant to share their 'true' feelings, even though I encouraged them to engage in a critique of my own position as teacher/researcher.

Unfortunately, I was unable to continue with the triangulation process because LEAP staff took offence to comments made by a student in Clearing House and temporarily banned this component of the course. At the end of my contract, I asked for some formal feedback from LEAP staff, which I explained would be used in a self-evaluation of my action research project. Janice, the LEAP coordinator wrote, 'Listening to the young person's point of view is an important aspect of conflict resolution and you put this into practice on many occasions'. Bracketing this, a more critical appraisal of my practice was contained in the following:

> I found that you were reluctant to enforce the rules of the project, especially if it meant having to 'dock' someone's wage. Unfortunately, this meant the participants knew they could push you and get away with it. The rules (and consequences to breaking the rules) were initially produced by the young people themselves and were therefore not unrealistic. As such, it is important that leaders ensure the rules and consequences are adhered to. (Janice, LEAP coordinator)

From a professional standpoint, it was my responsibility to penalise the students for failing to be self-regulating and complicit in their own oppression.

Reflect

An inherent difficulty of the action research process was that it politicised the contradictions and tensions surrounding workplace identities, practices and relationships. In spite of the collaboration between the two groups of students, I was unable to negotiate any more time because the research generated such anger, hostility and conflict that LEAP staff no longer wanted to participate.

To this end, the ideology critique and triangulated interviews provided me with an understanding of how LEAP experiences were structured within specific relations of power and authority (McLaren 1986). While the praxis of the research project was to open up spaces of dialogue and participation in order to change the working environment for all the participants, the question of student choice and agency ran up against the reality of administrative authority. Lagging behind the students' knowledge and understanding, I became aware of how the different locations of LEAP staff enabled them to control important sites of cultural production that shaped the students' identities and actions in relation to their class, gender, ethnicity and age. It was within this oppressive context that students continued to engage in forms of resistance such as shouting, kicking chairs, punching holes in walls or remaining silent. These acts of resistance were in response to their sense of oppression and despair and represented an attempt to reaffirm their dignity and the ontological validity of their lived experiences and knowledge claims (McLaren 1986). Clearly, the young peoples' behaviour was regulated through the discourse of the staff who had the final say in determining whether a student completed the course. In fact, almost half of the participants were eventually removed from the course for not behaving appropriately and breaking the rules.

If nothing else, my analysis of Clearing House enabled me to re-evaluate the taken-for-granted assumptions and expectations guiding my actions (a liberal belief in freedom of choice and individual agency) and to identify the problems I faced in realising my values in practice. By selecting which action steps I would take as a means of realising my newly redefined commitment to social justice, I understood action research to constitute a form of critical rather than technical inquiry. Without altering the underlying relations of production, I realised that my original focus on 'technical' expertise was a misguided form of individual inquiry, which implied a 'top-down' approach. Obviously, in light of my commitment to positive change and issues of social justice, my understanding of unequal power relations within the LEAP dramatically shifted the focus of my inquiry towards a 'emancipatory' approach which sought instead to 'empower' the young people (Kincheloe 1995).

Cycle Two

Plan

Moving away from a liberal standpoint on social justice (Starr 1991), I decided to try to shift power from 'the system' to the participants because I wanted to provide more opportunities for student agency (Tripp 1998, p. 45). I also wanted to help the learning environment become more alive with possibilities for growth and substantial change. To do this, I planned to:

- Be less exclusionary and provide everyone with the opportunity to speak and be heard (Giroux 1994).

- Enable students to reclaim the classroom as a social and political space where they could engage in a genuine dialogue with me and the other students (Freire 1972).
- Enable students to rethink the ways things were to develop a sense of self and their connection to the world in which they lived.

After I delved back into the literature on critical pedagogy and consulted with the students and my critical friend, my next action step was to begin this process through:

- Acknowledging the different histories, locations and experiences of students (McLaren 1994)
- Recognising that the social use of language incorporates many discourses (Mitchell 1991) and consequently acknowledging the different terms of reference and multiple/conflicting narrative styles used by the students to enable everyone to be heard
- Repositioning the students as critical participants and ‘makers of meaning’ rather than passive recipients of knowledge
- Encouraging students to subject this approach to continuous critique through shared conversations, written assignments and teacher evaluations

To monitor the process of implementation and the outcomes of this strategy (whether intended or not), I then:

- Made a point of recording anything I saw as a critical incident
- Worked with the above approaches, inviting the students to discuss anything I saw as a critical incident with me
- Wrote up their responses and, still with the above approaches, checked with them that I had understood and accurately reported their points of view
- Used this information to plan my next action step (see also Tripp 1998)

Compelled to take sides, in this way, I was still able to proceed with a typical action research cycle and navigate my way through the programme until the end of my contract.

In the ‘LEAP’ vignette, the first phase of the cycle might be described in Table 10.1.

This chapter has given you some understanding of the process. You will no doubt have many questions and even criticisms. Certainly, the extent to which any one PA^{t}R project is participatory depends to a large extent upon the researcher’s commitment, creativity and imagination, as well as the prevailing social and political context. For example, it is possible that Gregory could have worked more closely with the young people at every stage of the research cycle, including partnering with them to identify and learn participatory methods that built upon their own knowledge and abilities, particularly given the way they were silenced and misrepresented in the programme. There is an earlier and longer description (Martin 2000) should you wish to know more. Either way it is a useful exercise to discuss this example with others and with previous chapters as lenses for reflecting on the LEAP project.

Table 10.1 Cycle 1 LEAP

Entry	Initial contact as formal training facilitator and Bachelor of Education student
	Explanation of research process
	Negotiate participation/cooperation within a mutually accepted framework
Reconnaissance	Orientate myself to the programme context and how I feel about it
	Use a journal to begin writing up observations and reflections immediately
	Write up critical incidents and critiqued incidents (Clearing House) and share with critical friends (see Tripp 1993)
	Draw picture of the classroom to establish the structure of the teaching/learning environment
	Establish a dialogue with LEAP staff and students through shared/informal conversations in order to engage the participants in 'their own knowledge (understandings, skills and values)' and stay in touch with what is happening in the classroom (Kemmis and McTaggart 2000)
	Operate from a standpoint of social justice in a way that values the young peoples' interpretations and actions in the programme
	Based upon data collection and a review of the literature, I identify student resistance as a 'thematic concern' for the project – which problematises the idea that young people need to be controlled and have their behaviour regulated
	Contribute to the process of resolving practical problems and concerns raised by LEAP participants by targeting a social practice that is susceptible to improvement, that is, Clearing House (Kemmis and Wilkinson 1998)
	Critically reflect on prior learning experiences
	Research further the issue of student resistance (McLaren 1995b)
	Develop theoretical orientation by reviewing a large body of literature on critical social theory and critical pedagogy
	Write up research proposal and reflect on constructive feedback provided
Plan	Continue LEAP programme
	Set aside time to write and reflect as I attempt to balance work and study
	Plan first action step in detail
	How does the project aim to improve practice?
	How can the project be participatory?
	How can students be involved in finding solutions to their problems?
	Decide what action to take to initiate a formal dialogue and to 'capture' data, for example, methods such as focus groups
	How can I ensure LEAP participants are not 'disadvantaged' or put 'at risk'?
Act and Observe	As LEAP programme is progressing …
	Implement focus groups to ascertain what is happening from as many different perspectives as possible (triangulation)
	Record observations of participant actions
	Record research reflections in journal
Reflect	Critically analyse and discuss initial data and experiences of facilitator and group to evaluate past actions
	How can project be understood as emancipatory?
	Revisit the literature and make an interpretation

Guiding/Clarifying Questions

1. Who were part of this project and in what capacity did they participate?
2. What was the issue or problem that was identified for the project?
3. What do you think was the research question?
4. What were some of the ethical tensions or implications that arose?
5. How did the researcher attempt to understand the issues and context initially (reconnaissance)?
6. What may have been useful to add in the planning phase of cycle two?
7. Who was involved in the 'act' phase of cycle one and in what capacity?
8. What struck you as two important points from the reflect phase at the end of cycle one?
9. How did/could this feed into cycle two planning?
10. Using the checklist chapter as a guide how were each of the sections and subsections illustrated in this chapter? What was not reported or not evident in the chapter?

Extending Your Reading

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Chapter 11
Activist Research in the Cultural Professions

Section C: Going public

- Difficulties, limitations, cautions
- Checklist for activist researchers
- Example: LEAP
- **Examples in professional fields**
- Presenting research for audience

In Chap. 10 we outlined a project that worked to follow PA^{t}R principles and processes. In this chapter, we have included a selection of projects that have been carried out in the cultural professions such as nursing, social work, youth work, teaching, community work, health services and the like. It is important to note that not all projects are in published form, but these are samples and ones that have undergone peer review for quality of methodology and reporting. You will find many more in less globally accessible forms and when you do use them as guides keep one eye on critiquing them for their quality. Also, these date quickly so perhaps look for more recent examples as well. These are reported in scholarly journals and you might like to pursue them for greater detail or even as a template for your own PA^{t}R project. You will find that not only do the projects reported here illustrate what we are calling PA^{t}R, to a greater or lesser extent, but they also bring to the fore some of the issues associated with doing this sort of work. This dynamism reflects the ongoing development of action research and related forms of research, as well as some of the debates stemming from many aspects ranging from the ethics, ontologies,

lisahunter et al., *Participatory Activist Research in the Globalised World: Social Change Through the Cultural Professions*, Explorations of Educational Purpose 26,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4426-4_11, © Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2013

theories, methodologies, epistemologies, contexts and practices of this family of research and community interaction. As you scan the topics and abstracts of those we have selected, we encourage you to continue to apply what you have learnt from previous chapters to inform what you understand PA^{t}R to be. At the same time, we hope this will inform your practices for your own project.

As well as highlighting some of the contemporary research in the cultural professions, these abstracts also highlight some of the useful journals that publish activist research. In these journals, you can read further to enhance your depth of understanding and you can search for projects that relate to your own field of work. This is by no means an exhaustive list but provides some starting points.

Making Habitable Space Together with Female Chinese Immigrants to Hong Kong: An Interdisciplinary Participatory Action Research Project

Jackie Yan-chi Kwok and Hok-Bun Ku
Action Research, 6(3), 261–283 2008

Abstract
When women from mainland China have newly arrived in Hong Kong, their first difficulty is usually environmental stress. Their socio-economic situation often limits their ability to express their expectations related to their living space. In order to enable the women to voice their views and become participants in urban planning, our research group adopted interdisciplinary participatory action research, including non-participant observation, in-depth interviews, focus groups, photovoice, visual simulation modelling workshops, etc. In the process, we asked these newly arrived women to (1) offer comments on their current living situation, (2) describe clearly their preferred housing environment and (3) propose suggestions to the Hong Kong government in respect to housing and neighbourhood planning. This chapter intends to demonstrate the validity of the use of these methods to promote participatory democracy in the context of an urban living environment.

Keywords
Female Chinese immigrants, Participatory action research, Photovoice, Urban planning and design, Visual simulation modelling

Improving Continuity of Care Across Psychiatric and Emergency Services: Combining Patient Data Within a Participatory Action Research Framework

Liza Heslop, Stephen Elsom and Nyree Parker
Journal of Advanced Nursing, 31(1), 135–143
Published Online: 9 October 2008

Abstract
Presented with the concerns of emergency department nurses about providing appropriate and coordinated care for patients seeking mental health services, a Monash University School of Nursing, Victoria, Australia, research team chose a participatory action research strategy. Jointly executed with staff from the Peninsula Health Care Network, the research process brought together in a number of fora

multiple disciplines involved in the care and management of psychiatric patients. The participatory action research process itself was the first step in remedial action. Through it, participants and management gained a firmer view of the issues facing Frankston Hospital Emergency Department staff in dealing with psychiatric patients and in securing their access to suitable pathways of care. Other research outcomes included a compilation of summary statistics showing patterns of use by psychiatric patients of Frankston Hospital's Emergency Department, beginning discussions about pathways of care for these patients and the development of a screening tool to be used by the triage nurse for at-risk psychiatric patients presenting to the emergency department.

Keywords
Emergency department, Psychiatric patients, Pathways of care, Participatory action research, Nursing, Mental health policy

Participative Research in a Remote Australian Aboriginal Setting

Sue Kildea, Lesley Barclay, Molly Wardaguga and Margaret Dawumal
Action Research, 7(2), 143–163 2009

Abstract
This chapter describes the research process used to develop and evaluate an Internet-based resource aimed at improving access by health professionals to Australian Aboriginal cultural knowledge specific to pregnancy and childbirth. As a result of the research, women's st ories from Maningrida were recorded and presented on the 'Birthing Business in the Bush Website' which provided a platform for Aboriginal Australian women from Maningrida to present cultural and other information to maternity care practitioners. In particular, this chapter describes the development of the participatory action research combined with an Aboriginal research process and how this was guided by the Aboriginal co-researchers and participants.

Keywords
Aboriginal research, Childbirth, Indigenous research methodology, Participatory action research, Remote area birth, Women's business

Participatory Action Research for Community Health Promotion

Joanne Rains and Dixie Ray.
Public Health Nursing, 12(4), 256–261
1995

Abstract
Community participation is an important feature of community health promotion. One form is participatory action research. This chapter describes the process and outcomes of participatory action research conducted by a Healthy City in rural Indiana and public health nurse faculty. The community was integrally involved in the entire process, including framing of research questions, construction and

distribution of survey tools, analysis of findings and taking action on the results. Combining local insights of the community with technical assistance from public health nursing yielded multiple benefits. The role of participatory action research is appropriate for public health nurses because it is consistent with the goals and characteristics of the profession.

Enhancing Lives Through the Development of a Community-Based Participatory Action Research Programme

Tina Koch, Pam Selim and Debbie Kralik
Journal of Clinical Nursing, 11(1), 109–117
Published online January 2002

Abstract
A community-based participatory action research (PAR) programme that has spanned 5 years is discussed in this chapter. A primary health-care philosophy requires research in this practice setting and supports the way health care is ideally organised within an integrated team and supported by a community network that includes not only the health-care workers and service providers but also the community as partners. The principles driving three PAR inquiries are described as follows: the development of a model for prevention of workplace violence, working with clinicians towards improving wound management practice and management of continence for community-dwelling women living with multiple sclerosis. Participatory action research is a potentially democratic process that is equitable and liberating as participants construct meaning in the process of group discussions. We conclude that the cyclical processes inherent in PAR promote reflection and reconstruction of experiences that can lead to the enhancement of people's lives, either at an individual or community level, or both.

Keywords
Chronic illness, Community health, Participatory action research, Workplace violence, Wound care

Health Promotion and Participatory Action Research with South Asian Women

Choudhry UK, Jandu S, Mahal J, Singh R, Sohi-Pabla H and Mutta B
Journal of Nursing Scholarship, 34(1), 75–81
Published Online: 23 April 2004

Abstract
Purpose: To examine South Asian immigrant women's health promotion issues and to facilitate the creation of emancipatory knowledge and self-understanding regarding health-promoting practices and to promote health education and mobilisation for culturally relevant action.

Method: The study was based on critical social theory; the research model was participatory action research (PAR). Two groups of South Asian women (women from India and of Indian origin) who had immigrated to Canada participated in the project. The qualitative data were generated through focus groups. Reflexive and dialectical

critiques were used as methods of analysing qualitative data. The data were interpreted through reiterative process, and dominant themes were identified.

Findings: Three themes that were extracted from the data were (a) the importance of maintaining culture and tradition, (b) placing family needs before self and (c) surviving by being strong. An issue for action was the risk of intergenerational conflicts leading to alienation of family members. Over a period of 3 years, the following action plans were carried out: (a) workshops for parents and children, (b) sharing of project findings with the community and (c) a presentation at an annual public health conference.

Conclusions and Implications: The project activities empowered participants to create and share knowledge, which was then applied towards action for change. Health and health promotion were viewed as functions of the women's relationships to the world around them.

Keywords
Women, Immigrant, Culture, Participatory action research, Health promotion

'Nothing About Me, Without Me': Participatory Action Research with Self-Help/Mutual Aid Organisations for Psychiatric Consumer/Survivors

Geoffrey Nelson, Joanna Ochocka, Kara Griffin and John Lord
American Journal of Community Psychology, 26(6)
Published online December 1998

Abstract
Participatory action research with self-help/mutual aid organisations for psychiatric consumer/survivors is reviewed. We begin by tracing the origins of and defining both participatory action research and self-help/mutual aid. In so doing, the degree of correspondence between the assumptions/values of participatory action research and those of self-help/mutual aid for psychiatric consumer/survivors is examined. We argue that participatory action research and self-help/mutual aid share four values in common: (a) empowerment, (b) supportive relationships, (c) social change and (d) learning as an ongoing process. Next, selected examples of participatory action research with psychiatric consumer-/survivor-controlled self-help/mutual aid organisations which illustrate these shared values are provided. We conclude with recommendations of how the key values can be promoted in both the methodological and substantive aspects of future participatory action research with self-help/mutual aid organisations for psychiatric consumer/survivors.

Keywords
Participatory action research, Self-help, Mutual aid, Mental health, Psychiatric consumer, Survivors

Participatory Action Research as a Model for Conducting Family Research

Ann Turnbull, Barbara Friesen and Carmen Ramirez
The Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 23(3), 178–188
1988

Abstract
We discuss a participatory action research (PAR) approach to conducting family research. We conceptualise participatory action research as a collaborative process among researchers and stakeholders throughout the entire research sequence. Based on our 5 years of implementing PAR, we describe potential PAR advantages and challenges that need to be documented in future research. We propose a model of PAR implementation levels including the options of family members as research leaders and researchers as ongoing advisors, researchers and family members as co-researchers and researchers as leaders and family members as ongoing advisors. Finally, we discuss key implementation issues (i.e., defining stakeholders to include in the PAR process, maximising benefits and minimising drawbacks of diverse expertise and addressing logistical considerations) with suggestions for effectively addressing them.

Keywords
Participatory action research, Participatory research, Action research, Family, Disability

Participatory Action Research: A Model for Establishing Partnerships Between Mental Health Researchers and Persons with Psychiatric Disabilities

Melisa Rempfer and Jill Knott
Occupational Therapy in Mental Health, 17(3 and 4), 151–165
September 2002

Abstract
Traditionally, mental health research has been conducted exclusively by professionals with little input and participation from individuals with mental illness themselves. Participatory action research (PAR) provides a more dynamic method of research, giving individuals the opportunity to become activists and advocates by influencing the direction of mental health research. This chapter outlines important differences between PAR methodology and traditional research, with an emphasis on the differing roles of persons with mental illness in the two models. PAR is consistent with the recovery movement in several ways: Both approaches value self-definition, empowerment and experiential knowledge. As an example, this chapter describes one project that incorporates principles of the participatory action research paradigm

Keywords
Participatory action research (PAR), Psychiatric disabilities, Recovery

Photovoice: A Participatory Action Research Strategy Applied to Women's Health

Caroline C. Wang.
Journal of Women's Health, 8(2), 185–192
March 1999

Abstract

Photovoice is a participatory action research strategy that may offer unique contributions to women's health. It is a process by which people can identify, represent and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique. Photovoice has three main goals: to enable people (1) to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns, (2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about personal and community issues through large and small group discussions of their photographs and (3) to reach policymakers. This report gives an overview of the origins, key concepts, methods and uses of photovoice as a strategy to enhance women's health.

Keywords
Photovoice, Participatory action research, Women's health

Hospice Access and Use by African Americans: Addressing Cultural and Institutional Barriers Through Participatory Action Research

Reese DJ, Ahern RE, Nair S, O'Faire J D and Warren C
Social Work, 44(6), 549–59
November 1999

Abstract
This chapter describes a participatory action research project addressing the problem of African American access to and use of hospice. Qualitative interviews conducted with six African American pastors resulted in the identification of major themes used for development of a scale to measure barriers to hospice. A subsequent quantitative study documenting these barriers was conducted with 127 African American and European Americans. Results of both studies, which were used to further social action efforts in the community, indicated the cultural barriers of differences in values regarding medical care and differences in spiritual beliefs between African Americans and European Americans. Results also indicated institutional barriers, including lack of knowledge of services, economic factors, lack of trust by African Americans in the health-care system and lack of diversity among health-care staff. Implications for social work practice and policy are discussed.

Activist Participatory Research Among the Maya of Guatemala: Constructing Meanings from Situated Knowledge

Brinton Lykes, M
Journal of Social Issues, 53(4), 725–746
1997

Abstract
In this chapter, I analyse two separate experiences with the Maya in rural communities within Guatemala and discuss strengths and limitations of participatory action research (PAR) within this context. These experiences are the context in and from which I explore my 'situated otherness' within a praxis of solidarity and question-dominant theoretical models for conceptualising and responding to the effects of

war on children. Further, I explore, with my Maya colleagues, alternative methodologies (including PAR) for 'standing under' these realities from this position of 'other'. I conclude the chapter with a brief discussion of selected criteria that contribute to evaluating participatory strategies in PAR and a summary of current efforts to extend this praxis from situations of ongoing violence in Guatemala to more local sites, for example, Boston, Massachusetts.

Keywords
Participatory action research, Participatory, Other, Praxis

The Origins and Practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal

Robert Chambers
World Development, 22(7), 953–969
July 1994

Abstract
Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) describes a growing family of approaches and methods to enable local people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act. PRA has sources in activist participatory research, agroecosystem analysis, applied anthropology, field research on farming systems and rapid rural appraisal (RRA). In RRA, information is more elicited and extracted by outsiders; in PRA, it is more shared and owned by local people. Participatory methods include mapping and modelling, transect walks, matrix scoring, seasonal calendars, trend and change analysis, well-being and wealth ranking and grouping and analytical diagramming. PRA applications include natural resources management, agriculture, poverty and social programmes and health and food security. Dominant behaviour by outsiders may explain why it has taken until the 1990s for the analytical capabilities of local people to be better recognised and for PRA to emerge, grow and spread.

Shaping Local HIV/AIDS Service, Policy Through Activist Research: The Problem of Client Involvement

Jeffrey T. Grabill
Technical Communication Quarterly, 9(1), 29–50
Winter 2000

Abstract
This chapter argues that professional writing researchers can help shape public policy by understanding policymaking as a function of institutionalised rhetorical processes and by using an activist research stance to help generate the knowledge necessary to intervene. My goal is to argue for what activist technical writing research might look like, lay out an understanding of institutions that is helpful for influencing public policy and illustrate the promises and the problems of both positions by using the case of a study focused on local HIV/AIDS policymaking. According to this way of thinking, professional writing researchers can impact policy by helping change the processes by which policy gets made.

Intimate Details: Participatory Action Research in Prison

Michelle Fine and María Elena Torre
Action Research, 4(3), 253–269
2006

Abstract
This chapter enters the 'intimate details' of a participatory action research project nested inside a college-in-prison programme for women in a maximum security prison. Conceived out of a conversation of prison reform advocates, the piece is deliberately not co-authored by all of the researchers – prison based and university based – because this chapter is an opportunity to reveal some of the delicate and difficult issues of working inside institutions of abuse and structural violence. The issues discussed could not easily be spoken about by women in prison, or even former prisoners, without jeopardising their well-being. Through the findings of the PAR project, the piece will sample the impact of college in prison, but more intentionally, it will interrogate questions of epistemology, ethics, method and politics as participatory action researchers take up projects inside state institutions, enforcing neo-liberalism through the prison-industrial complex. The critical role of the 'outsider' who is 'privileged' to speak is interrogated, as is the responsibility to bear witness as the walls of prison consume communities of colour and poverty.

Keywords
Feminist methods, Participatory action research, Prisons

Reproducing or Challenging Power in the Questions We Ask and the Methods We Use: A Framework for Activist Research in Urban Education

Kysa Nygreen
The Urban Review, 38(1), 1–26
March 2006

Abstract
Many have argued that educational research does little to change (and may actually reproduce) the social-structural inequalities shaping the quality of high-poverty urban schools. Building from this premise, this chapter asks the following: How can university-based scholars of urban education do research that encourages, produces or informs change in urban schools and the conditions that shape them? I examine two broad aspects of urban educational research: the questions we ask and the methods we use. In both cases, I critique the dominant paradigm of technical rationality – one in which school failure is approached as a localised technical problem unveiled through neutral, objective and experimental research methods. In contrast, I propose a paradigm of 'political rationality' (Klees, Rizzini, & Dewees. 2000. *Children on the Streets of the Americas: Homelessness, Education and Globalization in the United States, Brazil and Cuba*. New York: Routledge) that approaches school failure and research practice as political issues situated within and shaped by social relations of power. Innovations in urban education research that reflect the logic of political rationality

include more contextualised and politicised analyses of urban schools and the expanded use of engaged, collaborative and participatory research methods. Drawing on this work and my experience implementing a participatory research project, I propose a framework for activist research in urban education and critically evaluate the limits and possibilities of such work to effect change in urban schools.

Reflective Learning in Action Research: A Case of Micro-Interventions for HIV Prevention Among the Youth in Kakira-Kabembe, Jinja, Uganda

Eddy Joshua Walakira
Action Research, 8(1), 53–70
November 2009

Abstract
The community dialogue (CD) approach is considered to be significant in teasing out the realities, concerns, priorities and challenges of meeting the needs of young people, which can form the basis for more appropriate preventive interventions. Community dialogue approaches were used in our study, which involved a broad participation of different stakeholders as part of understanding the social contexts of the youth and sexuality, as well as reflecting on what actions the different stakeholders could undertake to reverse the current HIV and AIDS infection trends among the youth. The strategy underscored the community priorities as the basis for intervention/action. After thinking through and discussing the various intervention options, women and girls within their groups reached consensus to implement selected micro-projects which would be combined with HIV/AIDS education activities. This chapter describes the key lessons learnt from implementation of these micro-projects through reflection. It describes and analyses the processes and nature of participation, the experiences of participants and facilitators and the challenges and issues relevant to address HIV/AIDS focusing on personal, social and economic considerations within the context of interventions.

Keywords
Community dialogue, HIV/AIDS, Behaviour change, Micro-projects, Participation, Youth/women

Empowerment of Individuals and Realisation of Community Agency: Applying Action Research to Climate Change Responses in Australia

Nina Hall, Ros Taplin and Wendy Goldstein
Action Research, 8(1), 71–91
September, 2009

Abstract
Using participatory action research (PAR), the research presented here sought to resolve the problem of whether climate group-initiated legislation could stimulate effective policy action on climate change. In late 2006, Australian public concern about the impacts of climate change and the federal government's weak response

became more pronounced due to increased media coverage and international developments. Locally based citizens' 'climate groups' began to form, including Climate Action Coogee (CAC) in Sydney. CAC wrote their own Australian Climate Protection Bill after being motivated by the UK's grassroots success in developing and promoting the UK Climate Change Bill. This chapter documents 10 months of the project, from inception to widespread grassroots endorsement and political awareness of the bill. The use of PAR processes tested and further developed the theory of double-loop learning and its applicability to such a project. These processes allowed CAC coparticipants to experience a transformation in their agency through developing their personal and collective political power. The project contributed to legislative outcomes on climate change. The findings contribute to academic literature by demonstrating the effectiveness of PAR in guiding social movement campaigns.

Keywords
Agency, Australia, Climate change, Grassroots, Participatory action research (PAR)

Local Communities Empowered to Plan?: Applying PAR to Establish democratic Communicative Spaces for Sustainable Rural Development

Barbara Bodorkós and György Pataki
Action Research, 7(3), 313–334
2009

Abstract
This chapter presents the second cycle of an ongoing participatory action research (PAR) project that aimed at facilitating bottom-up, sustainability planning and development in one of the most socio-economically disadvantageous micro-regions of Hungary. The process at the very beginning started as conventional qualitative research and gradually emerged to a PAR process as deeper relationships with local people were developed and previous research practices and research focus were questioned. Current institutional changes, such as the availability of European Union funding for rural development and the micro-regional re-districting driven both by top-down and bottom-up processes, were structural factors that created a more promising context for participatory planning. Although a PAR project generally targets silenced groups, for this to happen it is arguably necessary to legitimise such development work in the eyes of local decision-makers and funding organisations, in order to establish more inclusive communicative spaces around future rural development. However, this also creates a controversial situation: Breaking away from prevailing structural inequalities and hierarchies remains difficult through a process which is designed around consensus building.

Keywords
Ecological economics, Hungary, PAR, Rural development, Sustainability

e-PAR: Using Technology and Participatory Action Research to Engage Youth in Health Promotion

Sarah Flicker, Oonagh Maley, Andrea Ridgley, Sherry Biscope, Charlotte Lombardo and Harvey Skinner
Action Research, 6(3), 285–303
2008

Abstract
There is increasing interest in 'moving upstream' in youth health promotion efforts to focus on building youth self-esteem, self-efficacy and civic engagement. Participatory action research (PAR) can be a powerful mechanism for galvanising youth to become active agents of this change. Engaging youth in PAR and health promotion, however, is not always an easy task. This chapter describes a model (e-PAR) for using technology and participatory action research to engage youth in community health promotion. The e-PAR model was developed iteratively in collaboration with 57 youth and five community partners through seven projects. The model is designed to be used with a group of youth working with a facilitator within a youth-serving organisation. In addition to outlining the theoretical basis of the e-PAR model, this chapter provides an overview of how the model was developed along with implications for practice and research.

Keywords
Activism, Community-based participatory research, Engagement, Health promotion, Media arts

Guiding/Clarifying Questions

1. Choosing one of these sources, or another of your choice, identify characteristics of PA^{t}R.
2. What are the five most significant scholarly articles relating to either your field and the family of action research or PAR?
3. What research journals inform your understanding of PA^{t}R?
4. What literature informs your understanding of the issues on which you want to focus for your project?

Extending Your Reading

Clearly there are many avenues for you to extend your reading associated with PA^{t}R-related projects and literature. Begin a list of sources that may inform the shaping of your project or an understanding of the use of PA^{t}R in your field. This extends to other fields that may be asking questions that your field has not yet moved to but can nevertheless be informed by.

Chapter 12
Presenting Your Research for an Audience, or 'Going Public'

Section C: Going public

- Difficulties, limitations, cautions
- Checklist for activist researchers
- Example: LEAP
- Examples in professional fields
- **Presenting research for audience**

In Chap. 9, we outlined how you might write about your research project, that is, how you might represent your work for different purposes and to different audiences. We gave a more extensive list of genres beyond the common scholarly journal or research report and then illustrated an example in Chap. 10. In this chapter, we focus on the more formal report genre as it often serves as a rigorous base from which you might extract or adapt for less formal mediums. This is not to underestimate the value of non-traditional genres or new media genres, and we encourage you to also explore these for wider public impact but only after learning more about their strengths, applications, cautions and limitations. However, for many of you, there will be requirements for formal reporting as the prime genre as you engage with and learn through PA^{t}R.

It is often assumed that writing up a report is relatively straightforward and easy, particularly with the help of a basic outline or template as a 'road map' and the use of subtitles and perhaps some imagery. But careful consideration should be given to the style and presentation of the report, which is directly related to its intended audience and purpose. Remember, a report that is not read (e.g. because it is too difficult to read) has no purpose or effect. Boyle (2005) suggests, 'There is no single or correct style, although some elements of style will be more conventional than others' (p. 305). To write an effective report, you should be aware of and learn

lisahunter et al., *Participatory Activist Research in the Globalised World: Social Change Through the Cultural Professions*, Explorations of Educational Purpose 26,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4426-4_12, © Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2013

the conventions that are expected by your target audience. This is not to rule out the importance of working creatively within those conventions to influence your audience! Before you start writing your report, Boyle recommends that you should '… read similar reports written by others, focusing on the writing style they used rather than the content' (p. 305). Here, it may also be important to follow guidelines that apply to research undertaken within a particular institutional or cultural context. The same advice goes for writing journal articles such as those highlighted in Chap. 11.

A Note on Using Appropriate Language

!Before you even start writing, remember this – aim always for clarity in your writing – this is not a novel or a poem, you are not writing for literary awards, and you are communicating an important process. Convey your meaning in the simplest way possible. Do not try to sound clever. Just be clear.

!Be relevant

Yes, you will want to paint the word picture richly and deeply – but as you reread your work, ask yourself always, is this relevant? If it contributes to our understanding of the scene and the research, that is fine, but finding the exact words to describe the colour of the walls may not actually be relevant.

!Gender neutral, non-racist, non-judgemental

It is very important that you use appropriate language when writing up your report. You need to consider who your audience is and the purpose of your report. In all cases, use gender neutral language, that is, when you mean a person in general, do not use 'he' routinely. Use either 'they' or 'she/he' or your context might have a policy on this (e.g. all universities do). Likewise, do not use racist language.

!Jargon

People will often disparage 'jargon', but when jargon is actually specific and necessary technical language that conveys a very specific meaning, it is appropriate. However, always review the technical and academic language you use with consideration of your audience. You may need to clarify some terms or you may need to replace some terms with more generally understood ones. This is a judgement call and highly dependent on the context. Ask yourself always, who will be reading this and for what purpose? Likewise, when using a specific technical term, if you are unsure of how to use a term, find out or do not use it. If your reader is experienced in the field, they will spot the misuse of a term, and you will lose credibility.

!Grammar

Absolutely correct spelling and grammar are essential. Incorrect grammar and spelling jumps off the page. Your reader WILL notice, and you will lose credibility if you misplace apostrophes or use the wrong homonym (e.g. their/they're/there). Double check anything you are unsure of. There are many reference sites on the web to refer to. Have someone proofread your document – someone you *know* will pick up errors (not just your best mate). Likewise, if you are writing in a second language, have an experienced first-language editor proofread for you.

!Acknowledging and citing your sources

It is most important that you acknowledge and cite the sources you have used in your research. If you do not give credit for the words or ideas of others, you may be accused of plagiarism, for which you may be penalised. But citing sources is more than giving credit, following institutional policies or simply good etiquette. Indeed, it is a complex political process that requires a great deal of care. For example, highlighting a common danger, Adrian Holliday (2007) states, '… the classic approach to assuring textual room for the voice of the people in the research setting is through using their own verbatim accounts as the major data source' (p. 171). Given the power relations at work, however, extreme care must be taken with how data is selected, interpreted and presented or shared. This is because, as Adrian Holliday (2007) argues, 'It can also serve to reduce, rather than enhance, the humanity of the participant' (p. 171). Therefore, the inclusion of verbatim quotations (to 'give voice' to the silenced) requires that you are attentive to your privileged position as a researcher. Put simply, you need to be aware of the political effects of your research, particularly given the historical context of abuse, exploitation and misrepresentation, or deliberate ignoring of disadvantaged groups.

How to Read This Chapter

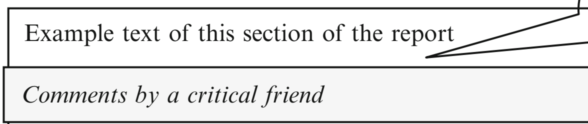


Fig. 12.1 Diagram of the format of this chapter

As in Fig. 12.1, each section is structured in the following way:

- Title of the section.
- Introduction in bullet-point small box to remind you of the purpose of each section of the report.
- Examples in a text box.
- Annotations in a callout box from the examples.
- Comments from a critical friend or mentor. This is in a second text box that is shaded and in a different font.
- ! To emphasise an important point relating to that section.

How to Write Your Report

The report structure we outline here includes:

- Abstract
- Introduction
- Research question/s
- Literature review
- Methodology
- Reconnaissance
- Cycles
- Findings and conclusions

This report structure is a rather formal and institutional structure. It would be appropriate for a university paper, for example your own context may entail adding or deleting elements of this structure. Hence, we use some examples of student work from a university pre-service teacher education programme.

Writing the Abstract/Executive Summary

An abstract is a succinct paragraph or two which briefly:

- States the problem
- Puts the problem in context
- States the method
- States the major findings
- States the implications and limitations of the research

An *executive summary* is similar but may be written in bullet points; it will normally only briefly describe the method and will place more emphasis on the findings and implications.

EXAMPLE

Educators and parents are constantly searching for new and innovative ways to motivate students in the academic setting. The life of a student can be challenging and stressful, and we as educators understand that children require engaging materials, interesting events and the ability to link concepts with prior knowledge in order to be academically successful and motivationally driven to succeed. However, many classrooms in our modern world of education are still 'traditional,' in the sense of a teacher-centered classroom. Direct instruction and obliging students are the themes of these classrooms. While teachers may attempt new and exciting ways to motivate students, motivation usually takes a back seat to the direct instruction in everyday school life. Through the methods of action research, and my nine-week internship in a grade three classroom in Ontario, Canada, I proposed a research question to examine and work towards improving this social issue in our classrooms; *Can we adjust the power relations when motivating students in a way that establishes an authentically collaborative learning community?* Students will become more engaged in the classroom if they feel that they have some degree of control. This action research project aims to work collaboratively with the students to develop a series of motivational techniques, implement them into our everyday classroom life, and discuss and analyze them with the students. Through the implementation of pictorial scales, direct observation, checklists, tables, whole group discussion, student reflective journal samples, and teacher journal excerpts, this action research project will unfold and reveal the positive impact and growing engagement that the students and I experienced together; interacting on the same level. Creating an authentically collaborative learning community was the focus, although student engagement, satisfaction and general enjoyment were all examined, academic improvement in particular curriculum areas were not monitored for the purpose of this project.

The comment given to this writer by their Critical Friend was:

Comments by a critical friend:
This abstract does not state major findings nor directions for further research.

!Write your abstract or executive summary LAST.

Writing the Introduction

It is difficult to get the introduction just right, especially as you decide how much detail goes in the introduction and how much goes in the literature review and other sections.

!Remember, your introduction is setting the scene for your research questions. The research question should read as a very sensible next step to the introduction,

so your introduction needs to set that up for the reader. Your introduction is important for signposting, that is, letting the reader know what they are going to read about.

The following may overlap, but in general your introduction should:

- State the problem in general terms, why is it important and why is it worthy of your research time and effort.
- Contextualise the problem, how does it arise.
- Outline the significance of doing research in this area, what will the outcomes be and who will it benefit.
- Explain the social justice implications of the problem.
- Give a general overview or description of what the research literature says about the problem.
- Use the research literature to support your explanations.
- Clearly state the research questions that follow from the introduction (refer to the guidelines below about writing your research questions).

EXAMPLE

Consider this *opening paragraph* to an introduction:
Research suggests that, although unintentional or on a subconscious level, teachers treat male students much differently than their female counterparts. Teachers consistently ask more questions, provide more follow-up or feedback, and have more overall interaction with males. Females are required to complete more work independently, receive more criticism when work is incorrect or incomplete, are called on 75 % less in classroom discussions and receive fewer constructive responses (Osler 2001). This treatment allows males to dominate during activities and discussions and also helps them develop a positive self-esteem. Females, on the other hand, tend to become more withdrawn, self-conscious and unsure of their problem-solving abilities. By late elementary school, a pattern of inaction has begun, and by the end of their middle school years, girls feel they are not as good as their male peers. Teachers also demonstrate a tendency to encourage males in the areas of math and science, while females are encouraged in the areas of reading, writing and social sciences.

Comments by a critical friend:
This is a captivating opening statement; it states the problem and how it arises, the significance of this as an issue and the social justice implications are strongly implicit, and the general research in the area is gathered together to create a convincing 'problem'. It is rather under-referenced, however, more in-text referencing is required.

!Draft your introduction and then rewrite it when you have completely finished the rest of the paper.

Writing the Research Puzzle or Question

There are many different ways to write a research puzzle or question. If you are writing for an assessment (e.g. for a postgraduate course), check the guidelines provided within that course. In an *action* project, the action orientation should be embedded in the question, and further, in an *activist* project, your activist orientation should be available. As we mentioned previously, you may not need to refine your concerns to a question as such. It may work for your team to consider your research in terms of a research puzzle. For example, in her narrative inquiry action research in a school setting, Vera Caine (2010) 'wondered':

> As I stood at the back of the classroom I wondered about my research puzzle …; wondered about how much their understanding of community had been shaped by and was influences by the mandated curriculum, by the lives within a Canadian school, by their diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences both in and out of school. I wondered whether the children would be able to speak freely of their notion of community, or would they think that there was one right answer? What or who had shaped their understanding of community both in the past and at present? How did they see and how did they imagine community? (pp. 482–483)

This way of formulating a research concern may seem at first glance rather more fluid and less constrained than a research question. It is no less rigorous however. You will work and rework your research formulation whether you present it as a question or a puzzle or in some other form. However you formulate your question, specificity and precision is the key. As the team formulates this aspect of the project and documentation, it may become another opportunity to really refine and clarify your thoughts: What exactly *are* you (and are you not) investigating.

What follows now unpacks this aspect of the project in terms of the research question. You can apply this advice to a research puzzle or whatever other way you formulate your research focus.

Recall from Chap. 9 that your research question should be:

- Specific and focused
- Action oriented
- Related to the various dimensions or elements of your problem/issue
- Open, that is, it should invite investigation and reflection and lead to complex, detailed responses (not just a yes/no answer)

Your research question captures the what, how and why of the project:

- What – what do we want to improve
- How – the action that we will take
- Why – the social justice driver

Jean McNiff (2002) suggests you use the basic question 'How do I improve my work?' as the foundation inspiration for your research question. Certainly, work practices are a legitimate place to start, but you can also incorporate community-based ideas and projects (see Chapters 5 and 9). As activist researchers, you will usually (hopefully) be working in a team, so we suggest you start with the foundational 'How do *we* improve *our* work?'

Then consider the what, how and why, for example,

EXAMPLE

How can I improve my teaching to raise the level of engagement and motivation of my grade four students and create a more positive learning environment?

- What – what do we want to improve? *The level of engagement and motivation of my grade four students.*
- How – what is the action that we will take? *Improve my teaching.*
- Why – what is the social justice driver? *Create a more positive learning environment.*

EXAMPLE

How can we reduce staff attrition by adjusting ward protocols and staffing rosters to enhance staff safety in the psychiatric ward?

- What – what do we want to improve? *Staff attrition*
- How – what is the action that we will take? *Adjust protocols and staff roster*.
- Why – what is the social justice driver? *Create a safer work environment*.

Do not be frightened to play with your research puzzle/question, and give it time to solidify. For example, in the above instance, the initial problem might have been staff attrition in the psychiatric ward. Reconnaissance might have revealed that staff are leaving because they do not feel safe, and further, the ward protocols (e.g. staff completing rounds alone) and the roster (e.g. the same staff rostered to nights repeatedly) are achievable areas of change for your research team (rather than say painting the walls a different colour or changing the staff-patient ratio).

You do not need to treat the what, how and why suggestion as a formula. It is a place to start in your research puzzle/question development, but it should not become restrictive.

What About Subquestion/s

It might be useful to unpack your research question as one or more subquestions. Consider:

- What other questions do we need to ask to feed in to the main research question?
- What other questions act as more specific foci that together support the answers for the main question?

- What other questions could help segment the main question in terms of levels, time, different contexts, different people and so on?

To organise your thinking, it is a useful exercise to write down your (drafted) research puzzle or question and then list every possible related question that you can think of. Then consider how that question relates to your main research puzzle/question. Decide whether it is in fact a research puzzle/question itself or whether it can be used to organise some other aspect of your project rather than feature as a question. For example, a common mistake is to list subquestions that are really a list of the information (field texts) that you have to gather to help you answer the main research puzzle or question. This is not such a bad thing, as in doing this you organise your thinking and begin to organise your project. For example, see Table 12.1 below.

Table 12.1 Extending your research puzzle/question

Research puzzle/question: *How can we reduce staff attrition by adjusting ward protocols and staffing rosters to enhance staff safety in the psychiatric ward?*	
Why are staff leaving?	Information question: Did HR do exit surveys?
What are the current ward protocols that the staff perceive as problematic?	Information question: Use it to guide field text construction, e.g. survey the staff and conduct a focus group
What is the current staff roster? Why is it perceived as problematic by staff? Who creates the roster, and what are the reasoning practices that drive the roster? What scope for change do we have?	Information question: Use it to guide field text construction, e.g. survey staff and examine HR policy on roster formulation
What is the relationship between staff safety and attrition?	Research literature question: What does the research already say about this? Write a section of literature review about this. Information question: Do staff report safety in their exit survey or interview, and are there anecdotal reports of safety being the reason for leaving?
What are alternate ward protocols? That is, how do other psychiatric wards manage safety?	Information question: Contact other hospitals and psychiatric wards. Use this info and focus group brainstorm to help in planning intervention. Literature review: What information can you find in the literature?
Are staff unsafe? Or is lack of safety more a perception than a reality?	Information question: How many incidents have there been in the last year? Review the administration records of safety incidents. Conduct a focus group to explore whether staff feel unsafe at work, in what circumstances they feel unsafe and possible solutions

! So you can see that unpacking your research question or puzzle in this detail is useful as the questions guide the research. These questions do not need to be listed as subquestions as such.

EXAMPLE

See how this student presented her research question.

The question that my action research project addresses is: *How can we adjust the power relations when motivating students in a way that establishes an authentically collaborative learning community?*

Throughout the planning, collaborating and analysis of this project, there were several key subquestions, as follows:

Power

- What are the relations of power in the classroom?
- How can we as a whole group examine the relations of power when motivating the students?
- Does the classroom teacher take any steps to making the learning community authentically collaborative? If so, what?
- How do the students react/respond to the power relations in the classroom?
- Do the students get any choice in what they are doing/learning in the classroom?
- Are the students given a chance to choose the ways in which they would like to be motivated?

Motivation

- Who is in charge of the motivational structures in the classroom (teacher/students/both working collaboratively)?
- How can we as a collaborative unit take active steps to enhance motivation in the classroom?
- What are the types of motivational strategies the teacher and/or students use in the classroom?
- How do the students react/respond to the motivational strategies used in the classroom?
- Do the students show signs of self-motivation?

Comments by a critical friend:
This list of subquestions is too long! However, you can use this list to structure both your project and your report of the project.

! If you do list subquestions, make sure you *explicitly* address them in both the project and the report.

Writing the Literature Review

A literature review establishes the breadth, depth and scope of your topic. Your reader will discover the background and context of your study. The literature review establishes the theoretical and methodological backdrop (who has done what about this before, how did they do it, and what needs doing now, i.e. your study). There is some leeway in how you write up the literature review and methodology; in some cases, they are written together in one section. If you are writing for assessment purposes, you are also *displaying* your scholarship. You display:

- The extent, nature and relevance of your academic reading in the field (beware: this is not just a show and tell of everything you have read)
- Your *synthesis* of your reading (putting together information from various sources)
- Your *analysis* (break information down into essential components/features and explore the understandings and relationships)
- Your *evaluation* (justifying a decision or course of action)
- Your development as a scholar – that is, how the positions you have adopted, theoretically, methodologically, ideologically and politically, are a result of your reading (e.g. this is relevant if you are writing for an assessment for a postgraduate degree)

The depth and extensiveness of your literature review will depend on the context of your report. If you are writing for an assessment for a postgraduate degree, for example, you will place heavy emphasis on the literature review and ensure it is a well-crafted and refined piece of writing. If you are making a report to your organisation, you will need to ensure your review still succinctly explains previous literature and research in the area, but it may not need to be so extensive and you will not have the added purpose of displaying your scholarship.

A successful literature review:

- Is organised clearly, that is, the logic of the review is clear to the reader and its relevance to the project is clear
- Demonstrates depth and breadth of coverage of literature relevant to the research question/s (one or two sources does not make a review!)
- Identifies where the gaps are in the literature
- Justifies your research question/s
- Can include a review of the literature behind your theoretical approach and concepts related to your project
- Demonstrates critical insight into scholarly literature. Critical insight entails:
    - Analysis
    - Synthesis
    - Evaluation
- Is selective about sources, that is, uses peer-reviewed scholarly and research sources rather than websites, professional resources (e.g. teacher resources, counselling programmes) and motivational speakers.

- Is well written, that is, the writing is cohesive, well connected and well structured; there are no grammatical or spelling errors, and expression is not clumsy.

Each of these elements will be restated in italics and unpacked below.

Is organised clearly, that is, the logic of the review is clear to the reader and its relevance to the project is clear

!Do not report on any research that is not relevant. While it may be interesting and you may have spent a lot of time finding it and reading it, if it is not relevant to this project, then it does not belong. To help you figure out the logic, ask yourself, 'What will a person who knows nothing about this need to know to understand why this project is needed, that is, useful and meaningful in relation to what is already known in the literature and in relation to the context of the study?'

Use your opening paragraph to signpost, as in this example.

EXAMPLE

In order to examine this issue, this review will firstly examine the controversy around the definition and diagnosis of ADHD, secondly, review the specific primary and secondary symptoms as articulated by the DSM IV and thirdly, overview the lively debate over different methods for dealing with ADHD, from behavioral modification to medication. While many argue that ADHD can have disruptive effects in the classroom, the final section of the review will consider research that has aimed to design pedagogical spaces that encompass the ADHD child.

This makes it clear to the reader what they are reading about and why

Demonstrates depth and breadth of coverage of literature relevant to the research question/s (one or two sources does not make a review!)
Identifies where the gaps are in the literature
Justifies your research question/s

!Consider Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Sources: Primary sources are first-hand accounts of research; they will differ according to your area of research but can include articles in scholarly journals, reports of parliament, reports from government departments, doctoral theses and original works like eyewitness accounts, poems, novels and art works. Secondary sources are summaries of primary sources or reports on primary sources, for example, commentaries, summaries, reviews of the field and guidebooks. Many fields have handbooks, which can be an edited collection of seminal works in the field (primary sources) or 'state of play' reviews of an issue or field (secondary sources). Tertiary sources give an overview, for example, many textbooks would be considered tertiary sources as they draw from summaries of research in a field. Focus, in the main, on primary sources where available.

Demonstrates critical insight into scholarly literature. Critical insight entails:

- Analysis
- Synthesis
- Evaluation

Analysis breaks down information into its constituent elements, so it may, for example, list pertinent features of previous research.

Evidence of Analysis

Social Justice can be enacted with in collaborative learning communities using the construct of 'democratic activities'. Democratic activities share the power between all of the members (McEwan, 2000). Authoritarian classrooms are rejected, as teachers are urged to model more democratic activities in their teaching practices (Spigelman, 2005). Teachers are also urged to encourage active participation in the creating of lessons and student learning, and paying attention to the idea that no voices should go unheard (Cornelius and Herrenkohl, 2004). Teachers were originally given the power, so it is up to them to share it with their students in order to create a collaborative learning community. The students will willingly become active participants as long as the

The constituent elements of Democratic Activities are explicated: power sharing, active participation and hearing all voices.

The authors own pulling together of the arguments

!Remember always that your literature review is NOT a persuasive essay. It is a presentation of the current debates in the field.

Synthesis will compare, contrast, abstract, relate and generalise multiple research.

Evidence of synthesis:

Comparing :
James (1995) and Jones (2006) agree that early learning is essential to success in school.

Contrasting:
While research indicates that young children benefit from a nurturing stable caregiver (Aye 2006, Bee 2004 and Cee 1999) debate remains over whether this caregiver must be the parent (usually code for 'mother") rather than other family member, nanny or institutional carer (Dee 1986, Eee 2007, Eff 2000).

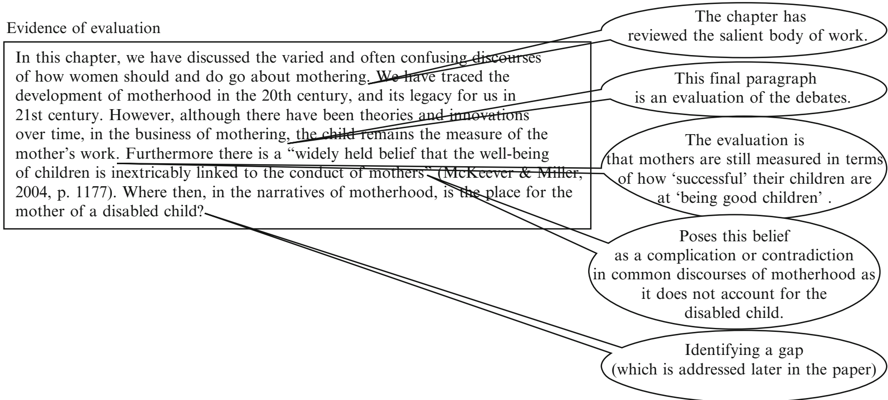
Generalizing
The responsibility of the teacher in the inclusive classroom is to provide students with cooperative learning groups. This will foster a sense of belonging as children learn about positive interdependent, cooperative behaviors, individual accountability and responsibility (Falvey, 2005)

This is a simple comparison of the views of two researchers.

Notice how this statement brings together two features of the issue: care giving and mothering. If relevant, the writer might also contrast the different debates in Dee 1986, Eee 2007, Eff 2000 about who should be the care giver

The first sentence makes a generalized statement and then the second provides a back up citation from particular research.

Evaluation involves judging the value of ideas by developing and applying standards and criteria. One of the tasks of your literature review is to provide enough of the arguments and counterarguments so that your reader can understand how you came to the decisions you did. It is not good enough to only provide one side of the argument and then conclude that this argument is valid. You have to demonstrate that you have engaged the debates in the field and identified where there are gaps, contradictions and salient body of work on which you will draw to inform your own project.



!A common danger is the literature review becoming an annotated bibliography. A way to ensure that you do not fall in to this trap is to organise the review around *issues* rather than *authors*. For each issue, you then demonstrate critical insight (i.e. analysis, synthesis and evaluation) of the findings of several authors.

EXAMPLE

If your topic is *Gender in Science Education*, your literature review might be organised around the topics:

- Gender, education and self-image
- Differentiated learning between males and females
- Gender in science education

Review the arguments of several authors under each of these headings and conclude with an evaluative paragraph that draws together what is relevant for your research.

Is selective about sources

Look to the sources that websites, professional resources and motivational speakers draw on, that is, what peer-reviewed scholarly research are they using to develop these materials.

!Be careful though: Professional materials will often only draw on the research that supports them. For example, there are several 'teach your child phonics' kits that do not mention any of the research that argues for a different approach to learning to read. Likewise, there are resources that describe and explain a professional process in every profession. These professional materials seldom argue the case. As appropriate to their purpose, they simply state their process.

!Search in Peer-Reviewed Academic Journals: A 'review' article is a great place to start – it will map the field for you, for example, Gagnon (2002) 'A systematic review of refugee women's reproductive health' summarises the literature on the topic in terms of factors to consider with regard to resettling refugee women, critiques the quality and gaps of such research, points to clinical/policy implications and research implications, and finally concludes by pointing to the type of research needed. This article would be a very important starting point for anyone wanting to do a PA^tR project with refugee women.

Handbooks are also a great place to find leads. Look at the reference list in the most recent handbook in your field of interest. For example, the *Handbook of Physical Education* (Kirk et al. 2006) gives a summary of what is known in that field and where the current research has gaps, contradictions or a wealth of literature. For someone who is new to the research field of physical education, this provides a good start to understand the issues, finds the literature that informs the topic and gives leads as to where to look next for a more specific topic such as the role of primary classroom teachers in facilitating physical education in schools.

Is well written

!This is important and not as subjective as you might think. It is worth having an editor and/or critical friend who is successful at writing look over the literature review. Reading it to yourself or your best friend seldom works as a final editing tool, although it is a start!

See the note above about signposting. This structures your literature review. Do not underestimate the importance of good structure. Your reader is not interested in simply hearing about everything you ever read, nor do they want to endure your meandering prose as the point unfolds like a mystery novel. Tell the reader what they will be reading about and why, and then use subheadings to guide them through the rest of the review.

!Your initial reading is likely to be very broad as you consider your research focus. You will find that some of the literature you read early in the process is no longer relevant. It is hard, but cut it from the literature review if it is not relevant any more.

Writing the Methodology

Your methodology is your rationale and your philosophical assumptions (see Chaps. 3, 4 and 5). You may write this into your literature review; it can be a standalone chapter or at times it is in a chapter called something like methodology and methods or research plan. There is always some flexibility, as long as you have a strong logic to your structure that is not difficult for your reader to follow and understand.

A methodology for PAtR would normally include:

- An explanation (with reference to scholarly literature) of action research as a general approach and the particular emphases of PAtR
- An explanation (with reference to scholarly literature) of the principles of social justice, reflective practice and deliberative action as integral to PAtR
- Biographical aspects of the writers/participants such as your philosophical and political orientations (with reference to scholarly literature)
- Ethics considerations and procedures
- A description of the participants and how they were ‘selected’ or how the research group was formed
- The methods/instruments used to create your field texts and the justification for their selection
- The methods/instruments used to analyse the field texts and create research texts and the justification for their selection
- A timeline for the project (proposed and actual)
- A budget and funding sources (if relevant)
- Any conflicts of interest and how they were managed

Writing the Reconnaissance or Background of the Project

Again, you may write up the reconnaissance as a stand-alone section, or you may consider it a part of the methodology section or part of the report of the cycles. A reconnaissance phase might be emphasised more if you are writing for assessment and have to present a research proposal; in this case, it will be quite detailed and expansive as it will provide the evidence to establish your research as valid and viable and gain permission to continue.

In the final report then, the reconnaissance is a summarised account of the context. The reconnaissance:

- Provides a brief outline of your approach to reconnaissance. This includes information about the methods of creating field texts and analysing them to create research texts. Emphasise how you have used a PAtR approach here too.
- Presents a rich and detailed description of your context as relative to the topic (remember: the colour of the walls may not be relevant!).
- Weaves the field and research texts you have gathered throughout the reconnaissance, in summarised, tabulated or graphic form.
- Connects this description to your research project.
- Reflects on the social justice implications of your reconnaissance findings.
- Connects your reconnaissance with what the literature in the field says about the issue.

EXAMPLE

Note:
The research question for the project is:
How can we engage these students with special needs in literacy learning to improve their literacy outcomes?

The students participating in this action research project attend Special School X. Given these students' special needs and diagnosed and documented intellectual impairment, there are particular ethical considerations. All effort was made to engage students openly in the research processes and further, their parents and guardians were informed and involved at all stages. This project does not conflate 'disability' with 'deficit', rather endeavors at all times to maintain an empowerment model of research engagement in keeping with PA^{t}R principles. Further, exploration of the meaning of concepts of emancipation and empowerment in this context is a specific goal of this project

Research politics explicit

In total, there are eight students ranging in age from nine to eleven years old. Student files reveal that two girls and a boy have diagnosed Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and are considered intellectually impaired (II). Another boy has Down Syndrome and II. The remaining four are diagnosed as II and many present with attention difficulties. Two of the boys, Roald and Mani, also have speech language impairments (SLI). Mani is more difficult to understand than Roald. The students with ASD are verbal but only on their own terms.They don't really have conversations, but utter when something sparks their attention. In general, the class is fairly high functioning.

Through observation of classroom activities (Appendix A), it became apparent that literacy strategies were not enabling students to build skills effectively or be independent authors of their own work. Behavior observation checklists (Appendix B) noted engagement of students during literacy activities. These checklists reveal that some of the students were often distracted and off task and some were quite disruptive at times. Assessment data (Appendix C) revealed low literacy scores for many.

Methods for creating field texts listed

Description and findings as pertinent to topic.

In focus group interviews (Appendix D) students agreed that music, exercise and storybooks were all things they enjoyed. Pictorial Likert scale surveys agreed, with students assigning 'smiley face' rankings to these activities (Appendix E). In individual interviews (Appendix F), most students said reading and writing was easy for them. This interview data was not in agreement with assessment results and observations. This sheds doubt on the reliability of interviewing as producing useful insight with regard to ability . It may indicate however, that students do not perceive themselves as deficient in terms of literacy. Disengagement in literacy activities then, may not be due to a sense of inability.

This project is based on the understanding that literacy is a critical skill for modern life and that maximizing opportunity for literacy learning is a matter of socially just practice. This reconnaissance overview has provided necessary contextual information to inform planning for cycle one. The aim of cycle one is to implement engaging literacy pedagogies for these students.

Make politics clear

Link Reconnaissance to project

Comments by a critical friend:
A good description of the context as pertinent to your project. There is no link to the research literature here.

!Raw data is seldom useful, for example, a copy of each participant's individual survey responses or full transcripts of interviews. It is better to tabulate the data in an appendix and draw on elements of it in the text. This may include direct quotes from participants. Be sure to include information that will allow the reader to know what and where the original source was.

!To conceptualise where reconnaissance sits in your final report, tell yourself the story of the research; the reconnaissance phase is where you sought information to confirm or deny the hunches you had about what was going on. Given that, now ask yourself, how extensive do you need your reconnaissance description to be and where does it rightfully sit in the story of the research?

Writing Cycle One

When you are writing up your final project, you could present the phases as cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting or something similar to that (see, e.g. how Gregory set his out in Chap. 10). Each cycle might read like one chapter, or all cycles might be described systematically within the same chapter with important points extracted for further discussion in the following chapter. How elaborately you describe these cycles will depend to some degree on your context, the genre of your project report and therefore the length or space you have for detail and what the audience requires:

- Use subheadings to indicate the cycle.
- Use subheadings at the next level down to indicate the phase of the cycle.
- Think about using a word or phrase as part of the subheading, one that captures something significant about the cycle (Fig. 12.2).

Plan

- Explain how your plan is related to the research problem or questions.
- Be clear about how the action is deliberative, that is, uses argument and evidence, including literature.
- Articulate the social justice implications of the plan.
- Refer to the methods or instruments or strategies that will be used for implementing the plan, creating field texts and creating research texts.
- Be clear about how the plan is reflective, that is, based on previous findings and/or the reconnaissance.

It is difficult to provide meaningful examples in this section. Our solution is to give you a short example of each phase within the cycles below (plan/act/observe/reflect/revise) and attach a more fleshed out report of cycles developed by lisahunter in Appendix.

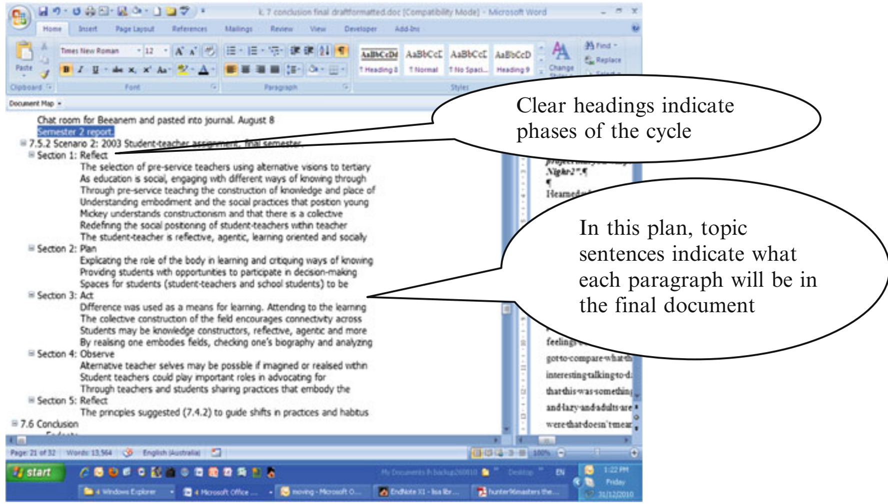


Fig. 12.2 A plan for structuring the report of cycle one

EXAMPLE

Extract From A Plan Phase

Extract 1

As demonstrated in the reconnaissance students in my classroom appeared to have difficulties in calculations using money even though the teacher had completed a unit on money. The data from the reconnaissance also indicated that students are average or above in all other areas of mathematics. So the calculations using money difficulty is an anomaly for this classroom. This cycle explored the use of examples that have relevance to the students. Research indicates that context is a very important aspect of mathematics (authors cited) and that contexts should be relevant, meaningful and purposeful to students. Hence this action phase used examples that are socially and culturally inclusive

Is clear about how the action plan is reflective ie based on previous findings or the reconnaissance

Is clear about how the action is deliberative i.e. uses argument and evidence including literature

Extract 2 (from another study)

This study relies heavily on qualitative data. While some quantitative data was used, cultural literacy is incredibly difficult to monitor in this way as it is rooted in a critical thinking ability. In fact, this was an attempt to avoid a grand irony as it is the typical nature of literacy tests to convert their data into quantitative data, which silenced this group originally. That being said, the first cycle relies on questionnaires, interviews, research diaries, and observation sheets.

Questionnaires are a useful instrument in allowing a degree of informality and also anonymity where need be. Approaching cultural perspectives can quickly become a loaded topic for many and formal/informal questionnaires are a safe place for students to reveal their thoughts on the issues discussed. Jean McNiff, Pam Lomax, and Jack Whitehead (2003) make note of a variety of strategies when constructing questionnaires, most notably the need for an attitude that there are "no correct answers", meaning that the aim is student feedback, not a desired response (p. 122). (…) This study also relied heavily on interviews.

Describes and justifies the methods used to construct data in action plan.

Extract 3

Drawing on results from the reconnaissance stage, my deliberative action plan for the first cycle consciously focused on the research task of alleviating pressures of hegemonic masculinity. More specifically, for the first cycle, I plan to alleviate competitive pressure s of strength through the use of …

Plan based on previous findings or the reconnaissance

Explains how your action plan is related to research problem or questions

Act

- Explain what actions took place when you enacted your plan.
- Explain the findings relative to the plan.
- Use data to support the description of the findings.

The act phase can go hand in hand with the observe phase. So you may choose to report these together.

Observe

- Explain what actions took place when you enacted your plan.
- Explain the findings relative to the plan.
- Use data to support the description of the findings.

!Remember to focus the report of your observe phase on the concerns of the project. This is an important point and one that is easy to lose sight of as you enthusiastically document what happened. You may find that you use only a fraction of the field and research texts you constructed when reporting.

EXAMPLE

Extract from an Act/Observe phase

Three contexts were used to situate the exercises in calculating money - football, swimming and makeup. These are activities that the students engage in outside school and they are gender fair in that football is a male oriented activity, swimming is gender neutral and makeup is a female oriented activity. I observed students engaging in the activities using an observation checklist to determine on task and off task behaviour and apparent motivation; I checked for understanding throughout the work periods to determine their understanding of the questions and their capacity to interpret them and thereby make the necessary calculations. At the end of the lesson students wrote in their daily reflective journals about how they felt about the activities and what other things they would like to consider when calculating with money. These data construction means were designed to demonstrate whether the contexts were appropriate and facilitated learning.
From the responses that the students offered in their daily journals and in conversation with me during the activities, it seems that they enjoyed working on the examples that were familiar to them. The observation schedules demonstrated that students were in the main, on task, and seemed motivated to complete all the activities be they in the context of football, swimming or makeup. However, although the students completed the tasks, the girl's journal responses indicated that they did not like the makeup context. The ad hoc comprehension checks provided an overview of students understanding, but no solid evidence. ….
(Tables and summaries of findings included)

Uses data to support the description of the findings

Reflect

Do not be overwhelmed by this list; consider the important elements for you to communicate in your context:

- Reflect on what your action and your research texts say about the research question/s and the issue or problem.
- Be sure to connect your reflection to the research questions.
- Explain how the findings relate to what the literature says about the research questions and what you have come to understand about your context.
- Identify gaps in what you now know that call for further investigation in a new cycle.
- Discuss relevant comments about the trustworthiness of the findings and any implications around the methods used to understand what is going on.
- Ask yourselves whether your question/s still remain unanswered and require another cycle.
- Ask yourselves whether you were asking the right question/s or whether a different question is needed to get to the heart of the issue.
- Return to your theoretical, philosophical, political and social orientations and consider whether the project adequately reflected such orientations or not.
- Reflect on each of your phases in this cycle and document what you think you learnt from each and what you might do differently next time.

Revise

This section of the report might be included as part of the 'reflect' phase writing, or it could stand alone, or be part of the new 'plan' phase. You will have noticed by now that there is a great deal of overlap and messiness between and within phases. This may be troubling and confusing to you. As you advance your PA^{t}R work, this will trouble you less. Just keep your eye on the ball: Your aim is to communicate the 'story' of the research clearly. Regardless of where you document the revise section, here are a few pointers to consider:

- Decide what was important to act upon in your reflect phase, and document this as the stimulus for a discussion about 'what next'.
- Ensure that the decisions that will feed into the new plan phase are clearly linked to what you learnt from the preceding cycle and any further reading of the related literature.

EXAMPLE

Extract 1 From Reflect Phase

The students in these classes have gone from being unsure and/or not caring about other cultural discourses to being creative and implementing a useful skill set. There has been a steady progression and with each new skill added to our attack plan, the classes did justice to their academic nature with quick integration and obedience.

As a student teacher and AR practitioner, I must confess a degree of pride with what the students have been able to accomplish. I must give them full credit as it is a testament to each class that they went from frustrated with early works by Neale to becoming able to joke around about their own small town views. At the same time I must realize this is forming a type of bias. As I become closer with this class, I cannot help but perhaps turn a blind eye to some of their failings. This is certainly not an excuse and heading into the remainder of the study, I will perhaps use my mentor teacher more to provide a control group to my own beliefs. I noticed late in the study that I will have to be more rigorous with assessing progress as I can see that while many students are grabbing the content quickly, there are some who are falling behind. At times I am so happy with the success of a new idea that I have not been stopping to confirm everyone understands. With the skill set in place, this is an opportunity to slow down and decrease the stress that I had at the outset of the study and start to work on the finer points of student learning.

I must also be mindful that I must allow the students room to explore. At times I believe I may be telling them about their views or telling them how their views appear as opposed to allowing them to make these decisions. While I do not believe this was done a great deal, there certainly was a point where students may have been mimicking my own perceptions of white people or Ancaster life. They need to be given a forum to express how they perceive their own racial homogeneity and personal writing in the following cycle should do this. While I have made use of my mentor teacher, I now have spent several week s working with her and feel that she is an under used resource that I can now trust.

Comments about the trustworthiness of the findings

Extract 2 From Reflect/Revise Phase

I had chosen the makeup context to appeal especially to girls, however their reflections revealed they did not like it. In hindsight I can see that my attempt to be gender inclusive was stereotypical, and further, was exclusive as I did not even ask the students what they do outside school, I simply made assumptions. Conferring with the students over topics and contexts for learning would help me to make my teaching more inclusive generally. The comprehension check using incidental questioning was not sufficient to determine whether students have now learnt more about calculating with money, hence the table below presents the results of the quiz undertaken on the final day of the week in comparison with the quiz undertaken in the reconnaissance phase.

Considers whether the project adequately reflected your theoretical, philosophical and political orientations

Extract 3 From Revise Phase

The students' early lack of confidence led me to use many group activities. While this strengthened their confidence to approach new material, I need to gain a deeper sense of individual conceptions of cultural discourse. I believe some students may have been going "under the radar" in that they are mimicking the thoughts and approaches of other students. Furthermore, the first cycle used a great deal of discussion and brief writing; the students needed to make the shift to long written pieces. While discussion forums were great for confidence building, I have a minimal understanding of each student's written ability to approach cultural discourse. This will be the foundation for Cycle Two as the leap will be made to incorporate deeper first person approaches.

Ensures that the decisions that will feed into the new Plan phase are clearly linked to what you learned from Cycle One

Writing Cycle Two

Plan

- Be clear about how the action plan is reflective, that is, based on the findings of cycle one and so on, as per cycle one.

  Act, Observe, Reflect, Cycle Three, and so on

EXAMPLE

To demonstrate the possibilities available, we include this example. Erin (a graduate student) reported her action cycles in this concise graphic (Fig. 12.3).

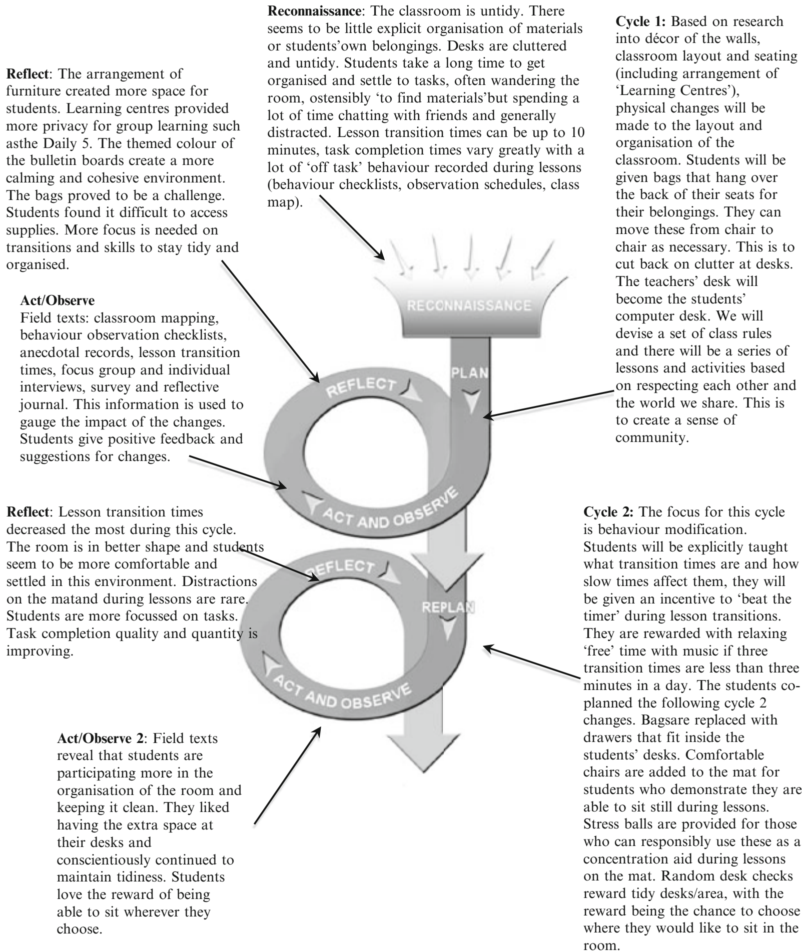


Fig. 12.3 Erin's diagrammatic representation of her project

Writing the Findings, Discussion and/or Conclusion

Whatever context you are writing for, you will need to consider the outcomes, what you have learnt, what the limitations are, what research might come next and what learnings might now be transferred to other similar contexts. The final section of your report might be called findings or discussion or conclusions or a combination, again depending on your purpose. Some writers deliberately use discussion or findings rather than conclusions as a way of noting that knowledge is an ongoing project. In a project such as PA[t]R, there is no 'end' or 'finale' or 'conclusion' as lives continue. As researchers, we step into the story 'in the midst' (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, p. 64) and step out again as the story continues, both for ourselves and the participants. Some writers have a discussion – to do just that, discuss the outcomes – and then a conclusion to make some final statement.

Consider your report a potential site for ongoing co-constructed dialogue. Having involved participants in the co-construction of knowledge throughout the project, it would be ideal to write the report as a co-construction also. This is not always possible, of course, for a variety of reasons. Be aware of the possibilities though. There are many ways to enable the multiple voices of the project, for true co-writing, to extracts or inserts from different participants at different moments in the report.

However you choose to structure it, your final section will:

- Draw together the separate dimensions of the problem to give an overall picture.
- Analyse the overall findings with reference to what the literature says about the problem (refer to your literature review).
- Summarises the effects of the interventions and the implications of the findings (you can refer the reader back to preceding sections).
- Consider the outcomes of the actions in terms of what has been learnt about the social complexity of the problem.
- Consider the justice implications of your findings.
- Outline the learning the team has experienced (this is more or less relevant depending on your context).
- Outline the limitations of this research project. This often refers to the limited nature of the context (often just one site).
- Consider 'what now', that is, outline some possible next steps. Next steps can include elaborating on these actions in this context and/or applying or testing the findings in other contexts. That is, what could be done to move this context even further in terms of the research focus and implementing the same interventions in another context?

As this section is usually quite lengthy, we have not provided an example. In the chapters that illustrated Gregory's practice (Chap. 10), there was no section that we could look to in terms of discussion, conclusion or findings, as it was not written up in the form of a report. However, if you refer to some of the examples in Chap. 11, or electronic theses online, you will see some very distinctive sections with headings

such as findings, discussion or conclusion. This is where the ‘so what’ of your project is captured and is therefore quite possibly the most important section.

Appendices:

- Ensure that all appendices are relevant. Sometimes it is heartbreaking to leave things out as you may have expended a lot of time and effort, but as always, if it is not relevant, leave it out.
- Summarise and tabulate data in most instances. For example, do not reproduce all the Likert scale responses; present the responses as a graph. Summarise the themes of interview data, using short verbatim quotes to exemplify and only including long verbatim data if strictly necessary.
- Cross-check appendices with text: Make sure all appendices are referred to in the text of your report.
- Cross-check text with appendices: Make sure all the appendices referred to in the text are actually in the appendices.

References:

- Cross-check your references with text: Make sure every source referenced in the text is in the reference list.
- Cross-check your text with references: Make sure every source in the reference list is in the text of your report.
- If you would like to have a ‘further readings’ list, it can be after the references or in the appendices.
- Format your in-text references and your reference list in a recognised style. If you are writing for assessment purposes, a style may be determined for you. Check the style manual or website for the style and adhere to the formatting principles.

! Do not underestimate the importance of correct referencing. You can lose credibility if your referencing is incorrect or incomplete, and it can become confusing to the reader. Remember, your reader may well have a lot of knowledge in the field and be genuinely interested in following up the sources that you cite.

Table of Contents:

- Ensure the table of contents at the front of your report matches the titles and page numbers in the text.
- Ensure all appendices are included in the table of contents in the same order and with the same titles as the list at the front of the appendices section (Fig. 12.4).

Tables and Figures:

- List all tables and figures after the table of contents and include the number of the table or figure, the correct title of each and the page number where it can be found (Fig. 12.5).

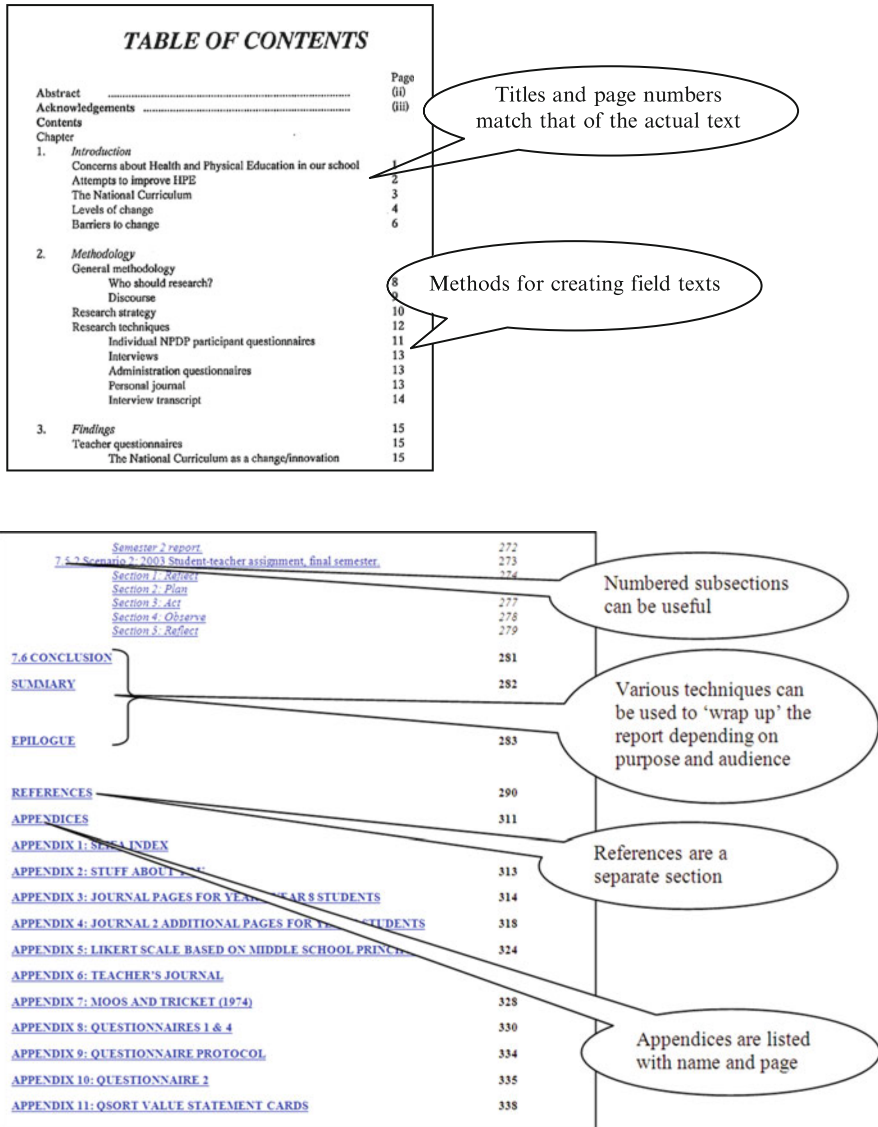


Fig. 12.4 Different formats for table of contents

Abstract, Introduction and Executive Summary:

- Revisit your abstract, introduction and executive summary (if appropriate) for a final edit and to ensure consistency with your project. The abstract is the one-minute explanation of the research, the introduction is the ten-minute background, and the report is the detail.

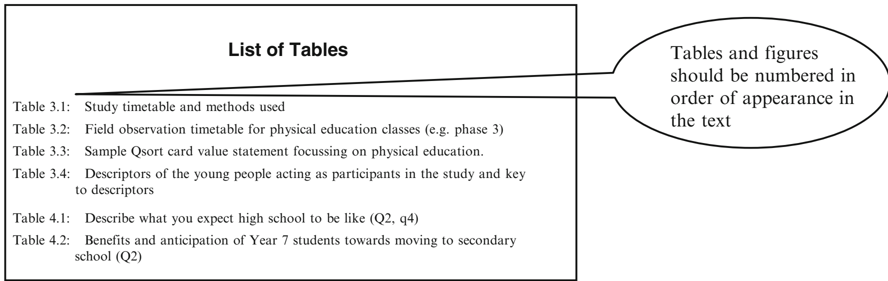

List of Tables

Table 3.1: Study timetable and methods used
Table 3.2: Field observation timetable for physical education classes (e.g. phase 3)
Table 3.3: Sample Qsort card value statement focussing on physical education.
Table 3.4: Descriptors of the young people acting as participants in the study and key to descriptors
Table 4.1: Describe what you expect high school to be like (Q2, q4)
Table 4.2: Benefits and anticipation of Year 7 students towards moving to secondary school (Q2)

Fig. 12.5 List of tables

- Formulate a title that captures what the research project has been about. This is one of the prime filters used by readers to decide whether to continue reading or not, so clarity, and perhaps catchiness, is important.
- Develop a list of keywords that would act as search words for your project should someone be looking online for a report such as yours.
- Ensure any acknowledgements, such as funders, sponsors and participants; ethics application provisions are included in the appropriate way and position in the report. You may be surprised how many people read the acknowledgements with real interest.

Other Ways to Disseminate Your Findings

This is a crucial step for the activist researcher; it takes the work beyond conventional academic realms. As we suggested in Chap. 9, you need to consider other ways to disseminate your findings, for example:

- Meet with participants to present and review findings (if you have not already done so)
- Staff meetings
- Professional development sessions
- Web dissemination: blogs, for example, information dissemination sites for your profession
- Newsletter (‘activist-friendly’ versions that are accessible to lay readers)
- Local media
- NGOs
- Academic journals

This chapter has been about how you might go about presenting or representing your research project as a way of disseminating the outcomes of the project and sharing what you have learnt. While we have been quite prescriptive for the sake of clarity, you will notice as you read more about various projects that there are many

ways to write up just one form of representation such as the report, let alone the many genres that are possible. There are many other useful publications and websites that can extend your knowledge about forms of dissemination, so while you might start with the ideas in this chapter, you will hopefully continue to read further and become more comfortable with the many genres and variations within genres.

!Beware – once you have reviewed a few ‘how to write a research report’ references, you will see the similarities and differences, do not spend too long and confuse yourself, and do not use this as a procrastination device. Settle on one and follow it – we suggest this chapter as a start ☺. We look forward to seeing your version in circulation very soon!

Guiding/Clarifying Questions

1. What sections are important for the audience, and what genre have you decided to use to disseminate your findings or communicate to others what your project is about?
2. What genres and sections are common in your own cultural professional field?
3. If the genre and audience is already determined for you, what sections are required?
4. What are some of the primary considerations when presenting your research for an audience?
5. What processes do you need to consider during the project to facilitate an effective write up at any point?
6. What section/s is/are the most important in terms of expressing the ‘so what’ of the whole project?
7. How will the dissemination item (report, thesis, article, presentation, etc.) reflect PA^{t}R? For example, how might social justice, reflexivity, praxis, activism and collective participation be reflected in the creation and dissemination of the item?

Extending Your Reading

There are many references to guide you in your research: from planning to writing. A simple web search will take you to many leads. For example:

- Search keywords in Google Scholar.
- Troll through the university URLs if you are writing for tertiary assessment purposes or accreditation.
- Look through the business writing URLs to communicate as a report and the grant writing URLs for grant writing purposes.

Other Useful Texts

Boyle, P. (2005). Writing the report. In R. Flowerdew & D. Martin (Eds.), *Methods in human geography: A guide for students doing a research project* (2nd ed., pp. 302–311). Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd.

Holliday, A. (2007). *Doing and writing qualitative research* (2nd ed.). London: SAGE.

McNiff, J., Lomax, P., & Whitehead, J. (1996). *You and your action research project*. London: Routledge.

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Boyle, P. (2005). Writing the report. In R. Flowerdew & D. Martin (Eds.), *Methods in human geography: A guide for students doing a research project* (2nd ed., pp. 302–311). Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd.

Caine, V. (2010, December 4). Visualising community: Understanding narrative inquiry as action research. *Educational Action Research, 18*, 481–496.

Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Gagnon, A. (2002). A systematic review of refugee women's reproductive health. *Refuge, 21*(1), 6–17

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Kirk, D., Macdonald, D. & O'Sullivan, M. (2006). *Handbook of Physical Education.* London: SAGE.

McNiff, J. (2002). *Action research for professional development: Concise advice for new action researchers.* Booklet available at www.jeanmcniff.com/ar-booklet.asp

McNiff, J., Lomax, P., & Whitehead, J. (2003). *You and Your Action Research Project* (2nd ed.), London: Routledge.

Chapter 13
Conclusion

> What counts as research is not merely a matter of elegant argument about methodology; social research is also about the politics of having an argument heard, a precursor to being understood and accepted
>
> (McTaggart 1997, p 1)

As you have worked through this book, you have seen that there are many issues, debates and practices that confront and inform the activist researcher. It is not a clear and linear path that we take but rather a messy to'ing and fro'ing between theory and practice, action and reflection, understanding and critiquing and observing and re-questioning. It can be very rewarding but also very unsettling. It has emotional highs and lows, especially as personal relationships with others in the project can be challenged and become challenging. This book has been created to help you navigate your work with eyes wide open as you attempt to 'make a difference' in your work as an action-oriented cultural professional. We know though that this work is not for the faint-hearted.

We have tried to honour the work that has gone before us by referring to the historical work of action research and participatory action research while also acknowledging that some work carried out under these banners is not necessarily participatory or activist oriented. *Participatory* and *activist* are two qualities we want to reinforce and explicitly value as important educational and societal features of research situated in cultural professionals' work. Those involved in such work invest in understanding and facilitating social change through research. This is not to say individual reflective and interventionist work is not also valuable.

As a professional, you will call on a range of tools. Education is one of those tools. More specifically, the PA^{t}R process enables an educative practice that is mindful of your specific context, coupled with an awareness of the issues and practices involved in change-making. The goal of 'making a difference' situates you politically. PA^{t}R makes this explicit. It is a process that is oriented towards reducing oppression: acting towards more socially just outcomes for those who may not (initially) have the power to act themselves.

lisahunter et al., *Participatory Activist Research in the Globalised World: Social Change Through the Cultural Professions*, Explorations of Educational Purpose 26,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4426-4_13, © Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2013

We hope this book aids informed decision-making about action in a community, action for the community and action by the community in which you as a cultural worker exist. As we stated in the introduction, we believe that the act of research is not just to understand the world but also to work within it in order to change it, to change its oppressive social structures, institutions and cultures. Perhaps, through your work and ours, we can influence the managerial, individualistic and technocratic cultures towards action of advocacy and social and political action to reinvigorate ideas of collaboration, community and humanity. We envisage a proliferation of Judyth Sachs' (2000) 'activist professionals' who embody such principles, not just in education, but in health work, social work, government bureaucracies, youth work, community development and any community wanting to make a difference.

We have attempted to provide a historical, theoretical, philosophical and practice-based framework for what we are calling participatory activist research, honouring action research, critical theory, participatory action research and related theories that are driven by social justice ideologies. We have used detail, but also checklists, to encourage you to work between simple and complex ways of understanding what your PA^{t}R project is based upon. We used the *guiding questions* and *extending your reading* sections to act as summaries and extensions to each of the chapters, and we try to illustrate much of what we explain to help you work between abstract ideas and concrete practice. It is in the dialogue between theory, practice, reflection, concepts and experience that you will come to understand what it means to be a participatory activist researcher. We look forward to witnessing you 'making that difference' as a professional shaping your profession and as a human making an important impact on humanity.

Good luck with your life's work. We hope this book has helped frame your future action as activism, introduced you to a powerful process that you can work with and speak back to and provided a starting point for long-term engagement with learning and social change for justice.

We will leave you with Stephen Kemmis' words:

> As *researchers* we are encouraged to make original contributions to knowledge; as action researchers let us hope to do that but also to do something far more important. Let us hope to make history by living well, individually and collectively, and by living well *in* and *for* a world worth living in. (2010, p. 426)

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Appendix

This is a brief example of one way that the *plan, act, observe,* and *reflect/revise* phases might be documented. As we stress, there are many good ways to do this. Always remember, the key is to *communicate clearly*. Our advice in this book is aimed at helping you do that. This sample report below is devised to show how the cycles might work. Notice that at times, the *act* phase will reveal some difference from the *plan*. This is fine in action research. There are many circumstances in real life that impact on a neat research plan. One of the activist researcher's many skills is to work flexibly within those circumstances and still maintain and achieve a clear goal.

The project used in this example spanned a one term unit of work in a school. We take the voice of a pre-service teacher who was completing this project while on her last teaching practicum before graduating. Her context is where the Health and Physical Education, Studies of Society and the Environment, and English Syllabi are used with students in year 7 to plan a semester of work exploring 'the body' as a social construct. The personal and social (group dynamics) experiences of the body were explored, and their unit included assessments.

Plan

The project guide says 'Outline your plan for your project and any subsequent plans that arose during the project indicating the reasons for the changes'. These I list below:

1. Present my biography to the students to introduce myself and introduce them to understanding their own biographies.
2. Students generate their own biography.
3. Students explore the ways their bodies are socially constructed and look at what sort of movements might have them feel particular ways about their body (e.g. if I

DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4426-4, © Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2013

teach some Shiatsu, I will draw out how they feel about the techniques of touch and the knowledge of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and internal energy work).

4. Students use their own knowledge and questions (Beane and Brodhagen 1995; National Schools Network 1995) to construct an individual and shared curriculum for the semester. This curriculum should fall within the HPE, SOSE and English syllabi and include assessments, all of which I can negotiate with the students.
5. I research the students' understanding of their body and their social position within the class. I can do this through facilitating discussions with them, encouraging journaling and drawing or making collages. I can also negotiate other ways by discussing with them how they want to re-present their understandings.
6. I report our findings to the students to examine the inter- and intrapersonal differences they were working through. Some students may like to work with me to collate answers and discuss how we might report to the group.
7. We explore changes in our lives (e.g. puberty, how they feel about themselves because of family relationships, group positioning and relationships with other people).
8. Explore group dynamics and how people can understand their bodies and themselves outside the restricted discourses provided by fields such as schooling and sport.
9. Provide students with opportunities to participate in decision making (in an attempt to be more socially just) by developing learning experiences relevant to the student lives.
10. Prepare some form of presentation of the semester's work to other teachers and parents.

Field texts created are the following:

- The student curricula
- The assessments students devised
- Student reflections on their own learning
- Student reflections on class relationships
- My personal teaching reflections
- Peer observations from my mentor
- Questionnaire for students to comment on my teaching
- Video tapes of my involvement with the students including the first and last lessons and the student's final presentation

Research texts as analysis of field texts:

- These field texts are to be analysed using narrative and life history.
- Simple descriptive statistics will be utilised where possible, for example, questionnaire collation.
- The documents will be analysed to understand the relationships between the forces at work in the classroom – for example, individual learning and group dynamics/learning.

- Reflections will be scanned using thematic analysis. This will reveal, for example, relationship between my reflections of my experience and the students' personal reflection and learning logs.

Act

Project guidelines say 'Describe the practices that you enacted'.

This section summarises my teaching practicum journal. The *italics* comments in the shaded boxes are links to the theory.

I told my own story to the students through pictures and words in a Digital Diary presentation, explaining why I was telling them and leaving time for their questions. They generated their autodigidiary, modelled on mine as an example and we discussed everyone's differences as a positive space for learning.

I was working on attending to the learning relevant to the lives of the specific young people to offer more engaging experiences, providing spaces for imagination and generation of new configurations of knowledge.

Using National Schools Network (1995) *The Middle Years Kit,* I workshopped with the students to organise our semester's work, and we identified individual and group goals. Difference was used as a means for learning.

'Difference' became the focus of each individual study and 'participation' the focus for the group project. We dedicated class time to both, planning individual projects to present to parents and teachers. The group project was a celebration of movement and music dedicated to groups and young people based on ethnic difference. I helped students contact a variety of ethnic groups and dance groups to visit us. As each group/individual came, we learned moves and different forms of music from which the students began to construct their own dances. During the term, we also studied some of the moves used in extreme sports, modern sports, animal and digitalised motion to insert into the dances. Each dance had a theme around body, movement and/or people.

The collective construction of the field encourages connectivity across the subject matter.

Students, in pairs or groups of three, organised each lesson, a roster being set up early in the planning. Many lessons included a guest including myself, the class teacher, parents, principal, community members and students from other classes. Guests contributed in different ways to the lesson, for example, teaching a dance or relating a movement-oriented experience. The guests' contributions were then worked into a 'movement' activity or 'group dynamics' activity or both. Although including a guest, the students ran the lesson. Each session was closed with a

'reflection' using various formats. All class members were encouraged to express what they learned about themselves, bodies, movement and group dynamics. They completed a self-assessment statement as part of their journal and filled in a carbon copy evaluation on the lesson for the student organising team. The student organisers for the lesson developed the criteria by which their peers evaluated them. They communicated this at the beginning of the lesson and received the carbon evaluation from each student at the end of the session to paste into their journal. At a later time, the student organising team summarised the comments, reflecting on how they might do things differently given the same opportunity.

> *Students may be knowledge constructors, reflective, agentic and more justly positioned within schooling if teachers address their positioning within the class and encourage them to be decision-makers in curriculum and pedagogy.*

Students presented their work to their parents and teachers in a mini-conference that we organised for the final week of school. This conference included the group movement performance.

The students also performed their movement performance at the year 12 certificate evening, and there was lots of praise for their work.

At the end of the semester, we revisited class and individual goals, and students constructed their report card, taking into account what they had learned and what they wanted to do next to extend their learning. This report was attached to the students' report cards for the year.

Students completed a questionnaire about me, based on the principles of middle schooling (Scott 1997) and then answered open-ended questions about course improvement and practices. This data was analysed with the videos, mentor teacher peer assessments, student reports and my professional journal.

> *By realising that one embodies fields (Bourdieu 1977), checking one's biography and analysing processes of legitimation means that teachers may become more agentic in creating conditions that encourage agency for young people.*

> *Spaces for students (student teachers and school students) to be agentic (Bourdieu 1977), learning oriented (Beane and Brodhagen 1995), community oriented (Kincheloe 1995, 2003) and reflective (Schön 1983) became important in how they were socially positioned within the field and how they participated in the construction of the field.*

Observe

Project guidelines: Identify the operating discourses and other personal observations of your teaching.

Positioned as a teacher (and adult) by the students meant I had to work very hard on their perception of a 'teacher' to have them conceptualise my role differently to the more traditional role of a teacher with which they were familiar. I explained to the students that I was trying to change student-teacher power distribution, and while some saw it as a weakness, they eventually appreciated being listened to. By midterm, the students had taken responsibility for the lesson, calling on me or my mentor, or organising people from the community to work with the group. In discussing how they might demonstrate what they have learned, they decided as a group to put together a booklet for teachers (including articles that we hope to have published in teacher journals) on their work and the learning they recognised as eventuating from working together as a social group. This they presented in the form of a mini-conference in their last week of school.

Alternative teacher selves to the dominant way of being a teacher may be possible if imagined or realised within teacher education. While being necessary, it is not sufficient to ensure new selves can exist beyond pre-service education. The practices of teacher education might include other supporting practices for student teachers to become participants in the reconstruction of the field, as professionals within the field of HPE, and professionals within education. Other ways of working may be possible, beyond those currently dominating teachers' work, but these need support from professional associations and schools as well as pre-service education. To be able to teach beyond the dominant discourse of HPE, that is, sport, health and fitness means one has to be able to imagine it first of all. Then, to work against these discourses means I need to understand and counteract how they play out through me even when I do not realise it.

Initially, discourses of competition, sport, biology, sexism, heteronormativity, body objectification, consumerism, individualism and healthism operated in my classes, in my teaching. Through my 'reflections' and 'challenges', some students (often those more marginal within the group and telling me through their behaviour that HPE was not working for them) discovered these discourses and how they were operating. When talking about difference, I introduced theoretical ideas about how gender was constructed, that we learned how to be masculine and feminine. Although most struggled with the ideas, their own questions for reflection in the second half of the semester seemed to indicate they were beginning to understand. I explained and demonstrated the pedagogical discourse of 'learner ←→ teacher' and constantly illustrated how certain rules, meanings and practices were shaped. I was surprised how well they understood Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus, using the sporting metaphor and then alluding to a game of life.

I successfully argued for the students to be able to write their own report card with me and to plan their learning in the next year. Once the students had written their reports and presented their learning to an audience – their parents and other teachers – my mentor was convinced about how much the students had learned and noted their increased engagement in class.

Pre-service teachers could play important roles in advocating for engagement with critical reflection from a range of ontological and epistemological positions.

To ensure this remains a possibility, school administrators, teacher educators, professional associations and education policymakers could collaboratively reify pre-service teachers in spaces where a pedagogy of imaginative praxis might occur and be supported. This could be in conjunction with ongoing teacher professional development.

The final discourse that I wish to explain was that of the teacher-learner, initially focusing on me but later also my mentor and the students. At the end of my practicum, the students and I presented our project to the rest of the class and audience as an introduction to the students' mini-conference. I showed a video of the class in action in the first week and compared it with another video of one of their last lessons. This illustrated how much they had changed in how they spoke to one another, asked for each other's help, respected others knowledge and engaged in learning. We illuminated many of their differences and how difference was used to understand social positioning and legitimation in the class to build a stronger group with different abilities. I emphasised we had all been teachers and learners, my mentor acknowledging this in her presentation on what *she* had learned. The parents and next year's teachers seemed astounded by the student presentations, in their quality, depth and insight. This was particularly so of those students who had been labelled as 'not coping' or having 'behavioural problems' by parents and teachers.

Through teachers and students sharing practices that embody some of the principles suggested in education rhetoric, such as negotiation, reciprocity and respect, we may be able to demonstrate to those currently positioned more powerfully within the field of schooling (principals, curriculum writers, education ministers) and HPE that alternatives are not only possible but also preferred if education is to be respectful, engaging, generative and socially just for young people.

Reflect

Project guidelines: Reflect on what your action and your research texts say about the research question/s and the issue or problem.

I found that my position of 'teacher' within my class shifted. Initially, I was marginal as the discourses that constituted the class were traditional, and I was not identifying or working with these. As my politics became clearer to the students and they indicated an approval of my use of 'difference' and 'participation', I became more centrally positioned. As the semester progressed and the students became more confident and regular in driving the learning, I was again repositioned as less central, yet the cohesion within the group had increased. Paradoxically, we had all moved closer together as a collective learning community yet expanded the space between each other through highlighting difference. This tension seemed very generative, although at times difficult as some felt insecure and ontologically challenged by the sorts of learning taking place. In some respects, I felt that this tension created a bind for some other teachers as well, specifically in how they positioned me as innovative but naïve.

Some of my ‘teacher’ practices were still difficult to enact even towards the end of the semester as they were not constitutive of my preferred self. I disliked presenting my biography or taking over from a student if their lesson looked like they might fail. Apart from my responsibility for safety, I still ‘felt’ that I was using my power achieved through my age and status as adult and teacher. I will remember this for next year given that I will have even greater responsibility (with no mentor present) and workload. My mentor has already made some suggestions as to how I might attend to these issues either by changing myself or the environment.

The students’ feedback indicated their experiences were positive, most acknowledging their new learnings with respect to their selves, bodies and the class as a collective. Although we had addressed the ‘taken-for-granteds’ working through their lives in the form of gender, ethnicity, social capital, body and movement, I think many (including me) still had deeply rooted and unrecognised practices that reflected oppressive and dominant ways of being.

I became more organised, assertive and confident by the end of the practicum. I had also become more invested in driving the lesson and had to constantly remind myself that I was trying to encourage students to drive the lesson. When the presenting students’ energy was low or preparation was incomplete, I was tempted to intervene, evident on the video by my agitation, body posture and physical placement in the class space and in my journal reflections of my frustrations about the lack of progress in the lesson. Next year, I need to incorporate strategies in my own practice and those of the students to allow for ‘low’ days and slow progress.

This project operated on two levels. The teaching practicum practised what I had learned through my university education, in particular, on how I will engage young people in learning – about themselves, each other and their world. At the second level, this project was about me developing a ‘teacher self’ through the practicum and identifying how I was becoming a ‘teacher’ according to the discourses I engaged with and introduced to the class setting. This begins a new cycle of action research for when I begin teaching as a qualified teacher in a school next year.

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