

Continuing Professional Development and Classroom Research

Teaching as decision-making

When did I lose my freedom? For once, I was free. I had power to choose. The mechanics of cause and effect is statistical probability yet surely sometimes we operate below or beyond that threshold. Free-will cannot be debated but only experienced, like a colour or the taste of potatoes. I remember one such experience. I was very small and I was sitting on the stone surround of the pool and fountain in the centre of the park. There was bright sunlight, banks of red and blue flowers, green lawn. There was no guilt but only the splash and splatter of the fountain at the centre. I had bathed and drunk and now I was sitting on the warm stone edge placidly considering what I should do next. The gravelled paths of the park radiated from me: and all at once I was overcome by a new knowledge. I could take whichever I would of these paths. There was nothing to draw me down one more than the other. I danced down one for joy in the taste of potatoes. I was free. I had chosen. [...] I put the day in the park first in my story, not because I was young, a baby almost; but because freedom has become more and more precious to me as I taste the potato less and less often. (Golding 1961: 5-6)

Action research...

“...raises to a conscious level much of what is already being done by good teachers on an intuitive level” (McNiff 1988)

“...aims to contribute...to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation...” (Rapoport 1970)

“...is about the systematic study of attempts to improve educational practice by groups of participants by means of their own reflection upon the effects of those actions.” (Ebbutt 1985)

“...is the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it.” (Elliott 1991)

“...is the way groups of people can organise the conditions under which they can learn from their own experience.” (Kemmis 1983)

“...is trying out an idea in practice with a view to improving or changing something, trying to have a real effect on the situation.” (Kemmis 1983)

“...is a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants...in order to improve the rationality and justice of: (a) their own practices, (b) their understanding of these practices and (c) the situations in which the practices are carried out.” (Carr & Kemmis 1986)

To be action research, there must be praxis rather than practice. Praxis is informed, committed action rather than just successful action. It is informed because other people's views are taken into account. It is committed and intentional in terms of values that have been examined and can be argued. It leads to knowledge from and about educational practice. (McNiff et al 1996: 8)

[Action research is] analysis, fact-finding, conceptualisation, planning execution, more fact-finding or evaluation; and then a repetition of this whole circle of activities; indeed a spiral of such circles. (Lewin 1946)

...as action researchers we do not claim to find the final answer to a question, but we do claim to improve (and change) educational practice through the educational development of practitioners. ...The validity of what we claim would seem to be the degree to which it was useful (relevant) in guiding practice for particular teachers and its power to inform and precipitate debate about improving practice in the wider professional community. (Lomax 1986)

Alan Pulverness

Norwich Institute for Language Education (NILE) - June 2016

Bibliography

- Edge, J & K. Richards [Eds]. 1993. *Teachers Develop Teachers' Research* Oxford: Heinemann.
- Elliott, J. 1991. *Action Research for Educational Change* Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Field, J et al [Eds]. 1997. *Teachers Develop Teachers' Research 2* Whitstable: IATEFL.
- Golding, W. 1959. *Free Fall* London: Faber.
- Habermas, J. 1974. *Theory and Practice* (trans. J. Viertel) Oxford: Heinemann.
- Hammersley, M. [Ed]. 1986. *Controversies in Classroom Research* Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Head, K. & P. Taylor. 1997. *Readings in Teacher Development*. Oxford: Heinemann.
- Hopkins, D. 2014. *A Teacher's Guide to Classroom Research* 5th edition. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Lomax, P. 1986. "Action Researchers' Action Research: a symposium". *British Journal of In-Service Education* 13 (1) pp 42 – 50.
- McNiff, J. 1988. *Action Research: Principles and Practice* London: Macmillan (1988); Routledge (1992).
- McNiff, J. 1993. *Teaching as Learning: an action research approach* London: Routledge.
- McNiff, J. et al. 1996. *You and Your Action Research Project* London: Routledge.
- Schön, D.A. 1983. *The Reflective Practitioner: how professionals think in action* London: Maurice Temple Smith.
- Schön, D.A. 1987. *Educating the Reflective Practitioner: toward a new design for teaching and learning in the professions* San Francisco: Josey-Bass.
- Wallace, M.J. 1998. *Action Research for Language Teachers* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wajnryb, R. 1993. *Classroom Observation Tasks* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wright, T. 1987 *Roles of Teachers and Learners* Oxford: Oxford University Press.