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Developing Work-Based Practice: Conceptualising an Action Research Mode

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Abstract

This paper reports processes embodied in the 'Developing Work-Based Practice' module in the Masters in Educational Studies programme at Edge Hill University. It considers the activities and phases underpinning the implementation of the module and the experiences of those involved. The tutor and peer-group adopt the role of 'critical friends' supporting participants as they progress in a small-scale action research mode. Outcomes of learning have manifested as developments in approaches to research and professional practice. The experience involves participants in adoption or adaptation of action research models or in the development of personal models. The approach reported here is essentially social constructivist. Conceptualisation and implementation of action research is supported by creation of a peer-group 'Validation Set'. It is proposed that the module offers an adaptable, practical approach to development of work-based practice, transferable to educative settings in addition to schools.

Keywords: Action Research; Social Constructivism; Reflection; Practice; Work-based

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Introduction

"Action research implies adopting a deliberate openness to new experiences and processes, and, as such, demands that the action of educational research is itself educational" (McNiff, 1995, p. 9). This paper is based on my experience of teaching participants in the 'Developing Work-Based practice' module (totalling 30 students in three successive cohort groups). I have drawn my observations from my teaching during the module and represent personal reflections on its delivery. I support my observations through scrutiny of participants' writing about their learning and experiences of researching and with extracts from focus group discussions of their experiences.

In the module, we focus on exploration of an action research mode which involves Education Masters students in exploring, planning and implementing small-scale research activity. Participants are assisted in establishing an area of focus for investigation and action research through peer-support, within a structured framework. Those involved are mainly teachers, but increasingly practitioners from health settings are being invited to opt for this module, due to its generic focus on practice development. I invite participants to explore and challenge stereotyped notions of research, to consider the origins, drivers and permission to be a researcher and to analyse the qualitative evidence domain. I believe that this module and the approach to its facilitation is educative in that it assists conceptualisation of action research and is productive in establishing a vehicle for the individual's practice-development. As such, I believe that it provides a mechanism for supporting continuing professional development, generic and transferable learning. It represents a practice-based action research mode which "reflexively engages the world to change it and is reflexively changed in the process" (Carr and Kemmis, 1995, p. 236).

Scope of the Potential for Learning in this Module

I believe that the scope of the potential for learning in this module can be expressed using Whitehead's (1985) notion of action research as, to paraphrase, a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in educational contexts in order to improve the rationality and justice of:

- their own educational practices,
- their understanding of these practices,
- the situations in which practice is carried out.

I justify the processes involved in preparing participants to become researchers within a small-scale action research paradigm using existing action research models and key, seminal, writers in this field as a focus. In this module I invite exploration of such models, but also provide an opportunity for construction of personal models, as variants, of an action research theme. The assessment process requires oral and written articulation in order to demonstrate critical understanding of models. I require that the participants' philosophy, values underpinning research, and the locus of permission to be a researcher, are considered alongside notions of rigor, validity, reliability and ethics. I conceived and developed the module around the following proposed 'Framework for Research for Work-Based Practitioners':

- Learning **through** a research mode has more learning potential than learning **about** a research mode
- There is closer approximation on rigor, validity and reliability of methodology and evidence if research planning and implementation is supported by interrogation by a 'Validation Set' consisting of 'Critical Friends'
- Research requires cognisance of ethical and professional issues
- Learning is supported by assisted construction in a tutor-guided group
- Learning is supported by conscious articulation via metacognitive dialogue and text production
- Adoption, adaptation or development of an action research model and associated methods of data collection are appropriate if the justification of the selection made is consciously articulated and subjected to robust peer-group examination.

I do not intend in this paper to propose a finite definition of action research or to analyse the relative merits of this theoretical paradigm. Indeed this would be a bold step, given the many definitions and explorations that can be found in the literature (see Bryant, 1996 in Scott et al, for such an attempt). However, I do propose a generic component of action research i.e. that it supports the conceptualisation and development of practice and encourages growth of 'conscious competence' (Dubin 1962) in educative activities. I seek to demonstrate that it supports the practical, pragmatic notion that "A research tradition which is accessible to teachers and which feeds teaching must be created if education is to be significantly improved" (Stenhouse, 1995, in Hammersley, p. 233)

I find, and offer, solace to those, who are perhaps concerned by an absence here of an attempt to offer an absolute construct of a theory of action research by arguing that "There is no 'best' theory about anything, just as there is no 'best' map of a particular area. All theories are devised for a purpose, and the best one is the one that helps you achieve the purpose most speedily, most effectively, or with the least effort" (Claxton, 1992, p.7). Claxton promotes permission to approach theorisation, including that of action research, with a helpful degree of freedom. Likewise, in this module I encourage a pliability of approach, unencumbered by a rigid, single, fixed conceptualisation of research.

However, I do propose that the possession of a scaffold or structure to guide thought is a useful prerequisite for a teaching programme if it is to be developed, practicable and implemented. The approach I used in this module offers participants the flexibility to adopt, adapt or develop a personal model or theory of action research. As guidance, I encouraged four requirements for action research for consideration, not as a stricture, but as key facets for focusing activity and energy. These are (Adapted from Carr & Kemmis, 1995, pp.244-245):

- having strategic action as its subject matter;
- proceeding through planning, acting, observing and reflecting;
- and involving participation and collaboration in all phases of the research activity

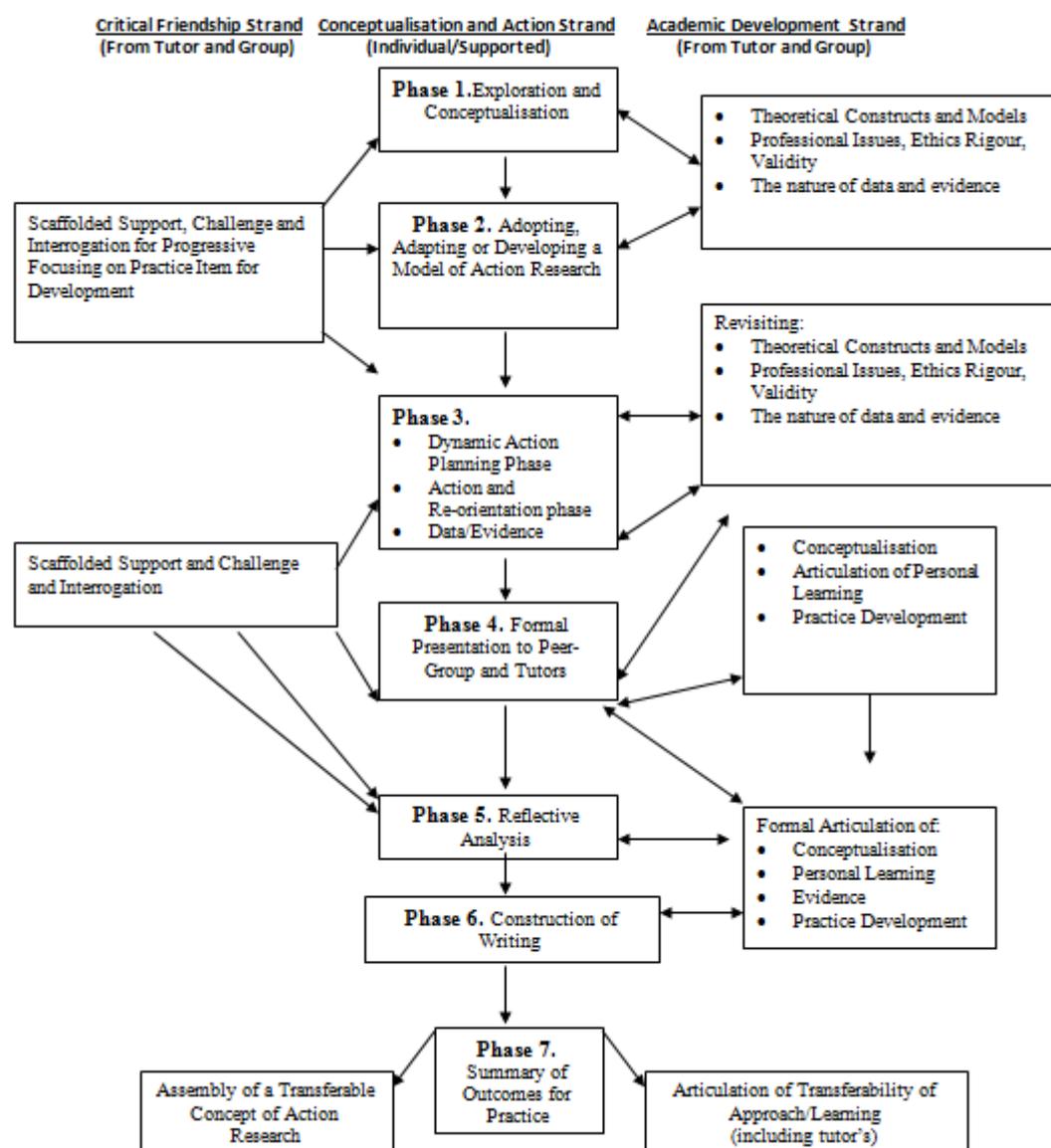
The processes outlined below offer space and permission for action research, which helps practitioners to theorise their practice, and to transform their practice into praxis (informed committed action) (Carr & Kemmis, 1995).

The Three Strands of Experience of Participants

The experience of participants in the module involves three strands (see Figure 1):

- Conceptualisation and Action (Action Research and Reflection)
- Critical Friendship (The supporting role of the participant peer-group and tutor)
- Academic Support (Sharing of theories, models and constructs from the group and from the literature)

Figure 1: The Three Strands of Experience of Participants



The 'Conceptualisation and Action' **strand** is presented in Figure 1 as the central route of the module. Each **phase** in this strand is supported by scaffolded activities and interrogation by the tutor and peer-group. This group discussion and analysis provides support for personal professional development; it sets the tone for a climate of peer-group support for individual action. The strand encourages thinking and its articulation as an adventure and a journey towards self-knowledge (McNiff, 1995). McNiff suggests that action research implies adopting a deliberate openness to new experiences and processes, and, as such, demands that the action of educational research is itself educational. In this module, the phases of planning, debate, conceptualisation and subsequent immersion in a research mode, provides rich substrate for personal learning to be expressed, supported, and challenged in the peer-group. This occurs during University-based sessions; is captured in formal individual presentations to the group, and in the assembly of a written task for assessment. Jarvis (1998) invites us to consider groups as a locus for social constructivism; knowledge is created between 'knowers' and hence he subscribes to a notion of potential for mutual, shared understanding and development of ideas through dialogue. The module thus leads participants' experience as one of assisted individual construction of understandings of their research method and of associated analyses.

Each phase in the module is dynamic, responsive, involves development and contingent re-orientations in the early phases. It is characterised by reflection upon action and action upon reflection (Elliot, 1987). At each step opportunities are provided for explanation and challenge to participants' thinking. This brings rigor and initiates metacognitive dialogue which develops and reinforces learning.

Metacognition can be conceived as a process making explicit the learning which is occurring in the learning environment (Bickmore-Brand, 1994). The module is intended to act as a vehicle for an assisted cognitive 'tour' i.e. one of searching, sifting, reflecting, construction and reconstruction of ideas for presentation in the peer-group. As such it represents "Cognitive constructivism (which) implies pedagogical constructivism; that is, acceptance of constructivist premises about knowledge and knowers implies a way of teaching that acknowledges learners as active learners" (Noddings, 1990, p.10).

Group participation in the module thus constitutes a research 'Validation Set' for the implementation of individual's action research which "helps practitioners to theorise their practice, and to transform their practice into praxis (informed committed action)... Through the process of reflection upon both theory and practice, reciprocal skills are created whereby each informs and influences the other" Carr & Kemmis, 1995, p. 237).

This 'Validation Set' approach embodied in the module is proposed as a justifiable research process in itself. It brings shape and rigor to the pursuit of personal knowledge and understanding. Equivalent outcomes may be less available to the mode of free thought in personal, solo-reflection and the engineering of a supportive group by the tutor provides a basis for support and challenge which supplements and enriches the action research of individual participants.

The Three Strands of Experience of Participants will be described in reference to Figure 1. The rationale, pedagogic approaches and outcomes will be addressed by focusing on the central 'Conceptualisation and Action' strand, and how its phases are complemented by the two parallel 'Critical Friendship' and 'Academic Development' strands.

In order to present the development of stages of the participants' experience of the module, I will address each phase of the 'Conceptualisation and Action' strand in the sequence of phases 1 to 7 as in Figure 1. In doing so, the activities associated with each phase will be outlined, coupled with a report of observations. Exemplification of outcomes and learning will be offered, to provide a flavour of the explorations that participants have been engaging in.

Phase 1: Exploration and Conceptualisation

This initial phase involves immersion of the group in debate around the following key questions:

- What might the purposes of research be?
- What might research look like?
- Who researches?
- Who drives and controls research?

Frequently, this phase has exposed limited concepts of research which are about 'proof-seeking', production of generalisable theorems, and numerically-led, statistically-based outcomes. Unsurprisingly,

development of best practice has emerged as a research theme, though often reflecting an initial simple conceptual model, a typical example being:

- Identifying of deficit e.g. in students' Standard Attainment Test data
- Deciding to do something differently to address it
- Planning to measure the outcomes and report them.

It is less frequently suggested in the first instance, surprisingly, that research may be about 'why' things may be the way they are in the practice setting, an aspect that became evident in the words of a participants, "An early learning experience for me in this module - and a very valuable one, brought about via peer-discussion – was to avoid trying to 'fix' what I perceived as a need, before first investigating my own perceptions" (Carol, Participant).

A predominant item that has arisen is participants' perception of a drive for those working as a practitioner researcher, to produce rapid, measurable results, available for scrutiny and which support public and professional accountability. This is perhaps indicative of the pressure on teachers resulting from the U.K government's historical drive for improvement in school standards, particularly via pupil-performance targets.

Whilst the above observations are not offered as a homogeneous representation of the thinking of all participants about the function and structure of research, they do exemplify a challenge for members of the group. This is addressed by reading of seminal literature on action research and qualitative research and active consideration of the following:

- the efficacy of researching, analysing and articulation of the practice situation under focus;
- the importance of the above as a prelude to making informed decisions about approaches to implementing changes/developing of practice;
- that evidence and data associated with research may take the form of qualitative, carefully represented, analyses understandings.

Participants are invited to think about the potentially restrictive nature of positivist, empiricist approaches in educative settings and to extend their thinking to include consideration of action research and its association with ethnographic approaches (see Hammersley, 1995). This has been particularly evident as a tension for recently qualified teachers and science and psychology graduates. One participant found the 'permission' not to have to represent data about her research into development of an outdoor play area for under five year-olds in a statistical form, as 'emancipatory' and unexpected within a perceived research hegemony. This is a real concern and is a key item of debate about how research may take shape and who controls that shape, "The aspiration to objectivity is mistaken in action research, the aim is self-critical reflection which helps the practitioner to emancipate him or herself from the dictates of habit, custom, precedent and coercive social structures" (Carr & Kemmis, 1995, op cit, p.236).

The notion of the potential of action research to serve as a professional agenda-setting device, to inform development of practice is explored. This supports and legitimises the generation of questions as a legitimate, qualitative outcome of research, "In action research and reflective practice, perhaps the most important message is that there is always more to be said" (Bryant in Scott, et al., 1996, p.119).

The next step is for individuals to begin to focus upon an item of practice development as the substrate for their research and learning during the module. This is assisted by the use of scaffolded pro formas which use the questions below to initiate the process of progressive focusing:

- What do I already do well? What evidence do I have to support this view?
- What would I like to develop?
- What would I like to change?
- How would I like it to be different?

Participants work in pairs to develop their articulation of ideas and then individually present to the group for discussion. The process is further refined by similar group activity to aid the production of an individual action plan, via consideration of the following questions (from McNiff, 1995, op cit, pp. 38-39):

- What is your concern? What is it you want to pay attention to?
- Why are you concerned?
- What do you think you could do about it?
- What kind of 'evidence' could you collect to help you make some judgement about what is happening?
- How could you collect such evidence?
- How could you check that your judgement about what has happened is fair and accurate?

The individual action plans are further developed via support from the group, assisting elaboration of the focus by considering and noting responses to the following questions:

- How do I know what things are like now?
- How will I know how things have changed?
- How will I collect that information?
- How will I know that what I am seeing is what is happening?

The focusing that this scaffolded approach brings is perhaps exemplified by one participant's identification of a group of unruly six years old boys. Her feelings were that their learning was deficient and that their behaviour was making the classroom less conducive to learning. She initially wished to experiment with her pupil management strategies, perhaps by implementing a positive discipline approach, to remediate the behaviour and its effects. The group and the tutor encouraged her to reflect and analyse her perceptions of why the boys may be behaving so. The result was a shift in her focus to researching about and around the environment of the boys, gathering data from and about them. She became more knowing of them by observation and subsequent discussion with the University group. This shift, and other similar episodes of re-orientation of thinking, were captured by the group and discussed as items of the research process. It accommodated serendipitous events and thoughts and 'side spirals'. They felt it important that this become a generic consideration for all participants in their planning. These events provided a useful back-

drop for consideration of the nature of the starting point for practice development and reduced tendencies to immediately adopt interventionist strategies, prior to making sense of the context they were concerned about.

The process of interrogation, challenge and support is a key feature of every phase of the module and is modelled upon the stated purposes of the 'validation meetings' for professional development programmes established by McNiff et al. (1996, p. 25) i.e.:

- to test out arguments with a critical audience who will challenge lack of clarity, help identify weaknesses and suggest modifications,
- to consider data and the way it is analysed and presented,
- to sharpen 'claims to knowledge' and make sure that the data support them,
- to develop new ideas,
- to generate enthusiasm for completing the research.

The University group has thus become established as a 'Validation Set' for participants, "The research process creates a forum for group self-regulation which transforms communities of self-interests into learning communities" (Carr & Kemmis, 1995, p. 239).

This validation structure in the 'Critical Friendship Strand' and the assessment protocol (see later) recognises and gives permission to participants to modify their approaches and thinking in a dynamic fashion during the lifetime of the module. It provides structure so that "... the focus of the research is narrowed and sharpened, and perhaps even changed substantially as it proceeds" (Hammersley, 1992, p.20).

At this point, and at appropriate junctures earlier, consideration is given to an ethical framework of research. This is focused on a small set of basic principles, elaborated by McLeod (1994) which is summarised below. These principles are presented in the abridged form in which they are used with module participants to explore how they may impact on their planning and behaviour as a researcher:

- Beneficence (acting to enhance the wellbeing of others e.g. colleagues, students)
- No maleficence (avoiding doing harm)
- Respecting the choices of subjects of research e.g. practitioners, children
- Fidelity (fair, honest and just treatment of others during the research process).

Thus, in the ongoing process of sharing plans and concerns, potential institutional/professional conflicts and dilemmas that working in a research mode may present, are raised, considered and advised upon by the group.

Phase 2: Adopting, Adapting or Developing a Model of Action Research

Upon reaching this phase, participants have considered a range of cyclic and spiral models of action research from the seminal literature as part of the 'Academic Development' strand of the module. This

typically includes the 'Action Research Planner' and Kemmis's self-reflective spiral (1981), variants offered by Elliot and Ebbutt, and McNiff's elaboration of such models via additional spiral dimensions (see McNiff, 1995, pp. 21- 46, for a summary).

Participants are invited to adopt, adapt or develop a model of action research, which suits the purpose of their focus on practice. It is reinforced that this may not be a static entity and that it may be altered and developed as the module ensues. There is, however, an obligation to justify and present their models to the group before and during implementation of their small-scale research project, and to similarly re-visit them towards the end of the module.

Some participants have adopted or adapted, with sound justification, extant models of action research. In addition, a variety of personal models have been developed. These include, for example, a metaphorical representation of research as a 'bus journey'. This focused on the effectiveness of a participant's work as a trainer of mentors to teacher-trainees. The central strand of the model was the route from embarkation to destination. This involved a research analysis of mentees' perceptions of good practice, to enable presentation of findings as items for discussion in the workplace with colleagues. However, the model was given added flexibility by allowing the journey to have 'sightseeing tours' at points along the way, when new observations or ancillary questions arose. It allowed the participant to explore the unearthing of unexpected sensitivities that mentors had about their own competence in practice in schools. This development of personal conceptualisation and development is indicative of growth in understanding of a dynamic process of (action) research.

A further example of a creative approach was a teacher's use of management of a parent support group as a vehicle for her research. She was assisting parents in learning about ways of developing approaches to supporting children with reading and writing of stories. She sought a way of investigating her perceptions of reasons for low levels of parental involvement in similar activities. Her model was essentially ethnographic in that she used the contact time with parents to discuss and identify successful and unsuccessful ways of working with that group. The purpose was to inform her design of activities with parent groups in future. By working from within this group, she was able to take the opportunity to check-out her individual perceptions of causal influences on levels of involvement. This occurred outside of the formality of questionnaire and interview, which many parents in the past had reported as disarming and threatening.

The focus of another participant's research was investigation of how she could become more effective in supporting a range of colleagues in her new job as a peripatetic special educational needs advisory teacher. Her key concern was that in a new unfamiliar role, she was uncertain of how to best meet the support-needs of colleagues in the wide range of schools she visited. Her initial model was one of a single spiral of acquisition of questionnaire and interview responses, reflection, and subsequent development of needs-related activities. This was to be followed by implementation and further analysis. During her operation in this mode, she radically shifted her model so that it included the flexibility to pursue unexpected questions and outcomes, many of which related to the different cultures and expectations in the variety of support settings that she visited. The development of additional tangential spirals in the model allowed her to follow the central theme of needs-identification, but also to capture many observations and reflections for discussion with the University group. The articulation of these data items greatly assisted her self-knowledge of practice and of the cultural mores prevailing in her practice settings. The examples above exemplify McNiff's vision of 'side spirals' in the action research process. The value of personal knowledge becomes evident in the words of Carr and Kemmis (1995, p. 237) when they stated "Personal knowledge is at the heart of the action research process; personal knowledge is the source of the ideas and interpretive categories used by teachers to articulate their experience and to bring it under self-conscious control through the action research process."

Phase 3: Dynamic Action Planning; Action and Re-orientation; Data/Evidence Collection

The University sessions provide weekly opportunities for assistance in validation and clarification of on-going plans and models. There are two key 'orientation items' adopted during group discussions at this stage. These are:

- Help us to be as clear as possible as to the 'what', 'how' and 'why' in your approach
- Consider how do you/ will you know what is occurring? What is your evidence?

The operation of this phase assists participants in devising the approach to their small-scale research project, and with consideration of the nature and collection of evidence/data. It helps them to implement enquiry in the practice setting and is part of the on-going 'Validation' approach advocated by McNiff (1996). I suggest that the debates and the encouragement to consciously articulate thinking, contribute significantly to sustainable learning and professional development.

Phase 4: Formal Presentation to Peer-Group and Tutors

As described above, each participant formulates a plan, operationalises it, and collects evidence/data. In order to capture the learning of participants and to support them in continuing their research project after the end of University-based sessions, each gives a formal presentation of their 'work-in progress' to the tutors and peer-group. The presentation is prefaced by an audit-scaffold of key considerations to assist preparation for this event. These are:

- Work in Progress
 - Outline of focus for analysis and practice development
 - Detail of Action to date
 - Detail of Outcomes to date
- Learning/Critical Incidents/Reflection
 - Communication of significant realisations/learning to date
 - Communication of questions/concerns as substrate for feedback via question and answer from the group
- A Future/Action Plan for the Remainder of Project
 - Report of current Status of action plan indicating any modifications based upon reflections/learning from the above
- An Effectiveness/Evaluation Strategy
 - Suggest details of method/s to be employed to monitor practice-development and learning prior to final written reporting.

During the presentation, each observer completes a running record pro forma based on the above. This provides a record of the key features of the presented content, and is used to log any observations,

questions or concerns that arise whilst listening. There is opportunity to question, seek clarification and check out perceptions with the presenter. Each observer then spends time completing a short summary of their personal observations, along with questions and any guidance they deem appropriate. This forms part of the running record and is given to the presenter to assist reflection on their remaining research and helps to capture any suggestions for re-orientation. This process complements the written task that follows at the end of the module which requires inclusion of consideration of any outcomes from this event.

This process is successful on several counts; it provides direction for the remainder of the research, offers a feedback artifact, acts as a prelude to the written assessment task and is an opportunity to celebrate fascinating work and growth of professional understanding of practice. It is a testimony to the positive development of the participants' group dynamic, a crucial feature of social constructivist approaches to pedagogy, or as Jarvis (1998, p. 73) states "A central (constructivist) method is 'real talk', which includes discourse and exploration, talking and listening, questions, argument, speculation, and sharing, but in which domination is replaced by reciprocity and cooperation."

Phase 5: Reflective Analysis Phase

Whilst reflection and analysis characterise all phases of the module, the structure of the presentation and written task encourages participants to specifically articulate both their action and their learning. I proposed this earlier as constituting a research methodology in itself; the journey of constructing and verbalising such articulations brings clarity and structure to the reflective process. The assembly of the written task is guided by the following audit-scaffold, which is intended to assist the capture and organisation of ideas:

Introduction

- Explanation of rationale; articulation of the focus for development of practice and reasons for its choice.
- Consideration of theoretical underpinning from the literature, germane to the practice focus.
- Summary and explanation of responses to feedback from interrogation at the preceding presentation (changes action, reorientation of plans etc.)

Methodology

- Commentary on action/development of practice, including the key features of the action undertaken. Justification for the selection of an action research model from the literature, adaptation of a model, or development of a personal model. Critical analysis of fitness for purpose.
- Considerations of associated ethical/professional issues
- Consideration of issues of validity and reliability as elaborated in the 'Validation Set' activities.

Data

- Detail of outcomes/development of practice and personal reflections
- A record of any critical incidents

Data Analysis and Commentary

- Analysis of data

- Reflection upon critical incidents during the research, including success- points and analysis of any difficulties experienced

Conclusion

- Critical Evaluation and Reflection upon data, the effectiveness of the research and its impact on development of practice
- Identification of personal learning, and critical reflection upon it
- Inclusion of reference to future development of the selected area of practice (real or potential)
- Consideration of transferability of learning to future development of practice, including articulation of a concept of action research
- Explanation and justification of any further personal professional development needs that have been identified during the research process.

Phase 6: Construction of Writing Phase

This is an extension of the Reflective-Analysis dimension. Participants have, by this phase, already undertaken a research journey of oral articulation in the 'Validation Set' and have engaged with critical analysis in the formal presentation event. The final phase is writing construction. This is a further opportunity for learning and self-analysis. Writing is an additional component of the module's cognitive journey, and I suggest has merits in the research process described. The function in this context is that writing assists the articulation of learning and that it promotes the conscious integration of information and construction of ideas. It may force people to sustain their focus and attention on a given topic for a longer period than by thought alone. Because writing is less rapid than thinking, ideas may be elaborated in greater detail and depth, or in the words of Pennebaker (1997, p. 191) "Writing is more 'linear' than thinking, in that writing forces an entire idea to be transcribed before another is entertained."

The written task focuses on reflections on the research process as well as reporting it per se and constitutes an additional tool for capturing conscious articulation. This, I suggest, is likely to enhance transferability of knowledge to future development of work-based practice, as it encourages a deliberate attempt at construction of a record of what has been learned. It is a process of reflection and metacognition, bringing possession of one's way of knowing and understanding to the fore. Pereira (1996, p. 27) states "If we can cultivate an awareness of their own individual processes of learning we open the door to the ability to control their own learning."

Phase 7: Summary of Outcomes for Practice

Participation in the 'Developing Work-Based Practice' module has learning outcomes for all those involved.

For Participants:

- Learning about the (action) research process and critical analysis of the structure and function of models.
- Subsequent accumulation of knowledge of practice.
- Development of practice and praxis (informed committed action)

- Participants' consciousness of transferability of an action research mode to other areas of practice-development (i.e. sustained learning)
- Subscription of participants to the efficacy of the 'Validation Set' approach

The value of this module became evident in the words of Anne, a participant, who stated "I feel now that I am more in control of my practice. I am better informed and can justify my actions and better defend my educational values. I also feel more self-critical and more positive about finding solutions to educational problems" and another participant, Suzanne, noted "The involvement in this module, and discussions that took place were liberating in the sense that they raised questions which enabled me to develop and improve my practice." Carol, another participant, mentioned:

I have particularly valued and appreciated the power of feedback from peers and tutors, their support, constructive criticism and advice. Having to explain and justify my model was an excellent means of ensuring clarity in my own mind. This was particularly useful in the early stages, when formulating the focus of my research; it was also helpful when preparing for my presentation, which tested out the route that I had thus far taken, and that which was yet to be travelled. It also ensured that I revisit the issues of ethics, reliability and validity.

For the University Teachers:

- Consciousness of a model of module delivery which itself serves as a research and professional development vehicle
- A proposition that the module is generic and thus transferable to other practice settings which are educative e.g. health services, law, industrial training. It has extended the repertoire of potential provision of continuing professional development.
- Consideration of potential for transfer of this approach to undergraduates in initial teacher education and other education studies programmes.

Conclusion

I have reported the structure adopted in the 'Developing Work-Based Practice' module to support the conceptualisation and operation of an action research mode. My personal exploration and articulation of the strands as the 'teacher' has also constituted a research journey, operating in parallel to the module participants. Observation of the participants, of their debates and presentation of findings affirms my commitment to the tenets proposed in the '**Framework for Research**' in the introduction section of this paper. A principal affirmation is that, learning **through** a research mode has more learning potential than learning **about** a research mode. This is also highlighted by Ghaye and Ghaye (1998, p. 5) who state that reflective practice is a research process, the process of:

... generation of professional knowledge and the improvement of practice, through reflection of one kind or another, can be appropriately described as a research process. The reflective practitioner is a researcher. Reflective practice is a research process in which the fruits of reflection are used to challenge and reconstruct individual and collective teacher action.

The cognitive, conceptual journey undertaken during the module has served as a double-edged sword. It has provided a research experience for both tutor and tutee. The processes underpinning writing this

paper, for me, mirror the central intentions of the initial design of the module, i.e. that involvement would be educative for all.

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