Research in Action

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Abstract

Action or lifeworld enquiry provides insightful methods of observing, analysing and explaining lifeworld experiences. This chapter explores how lifeworld experiences can be researched as they unfold or in action. Paradigmatic shifts away from traditional positivist epistemology has enabled the emergence of a range of interpretive methodologies that offer an alternative way to approach research in action. One such methodology is action research. Action research, which is also known as participatory action research (PAR), community-based study and co-operative enquiry is an approach commonly used for improving conditions and practices in a range environments (Lingard, et al., 2008 in Whitelaw et al., 2003).

This chapter specifically explores how action research can be used as an immersive research methodology that can be used to explore lifeworld experiences in action. In particular, action research is positioned as an effective research methodology that can be used with teachers working in contexts with a high degree of intersectionality, namely inner-city schools with diverse populations. Action research can also provide an effective alternative approach to teacher professional development, moving away from a 'one size fits all' approach, to a more responsive and personalised method that acknowledges the teaching and learning context. Action research can also be used to empower teachers to become better educators by connecting theory and practice and/or respond sensitively to the intersectional nature of their working environment. This in turn creates research informed educators with the resource to be able to challenge and improve educational practice.

Introduction

Some research methodologies and methods may not have the flexibility required to explore teaching and coaching pedagogies in depth, or more specifically in action. Often research methodologies and methods aim to create controllable environments whereby the significance of an intervention can be observed, measured and analysed objectively. This approach is not without merit and can provide insight into the impact of some pedagogical teaching and learning interventions, this data can then be used to make generalised recommendations. However, anyone that has ever taught or coached children or adults will appreciate that

teaching, coaching and learning is not a simple or objective endeavour but is instead, is a very complex and moreover, an incredibly intricate and subjective process. This subjectivity is then compounded when working within contexts with a high degree of intersectionality, difference or otherness. In particular inner-city schools and the children who attend these schools are often labelled as problematic and challenging. There is also a lack of support for schools and teachers in dealing with problematic and challenging students with guidance often being de-contextualised and too generic to have any impact in practice and in context. As a result, more constructionist and interpretive methodologies and methods have emerged to explore pedagogy and andragogy. This has resulted in the development of more robust research methods which have also given rise to an increased credibility of this type of research enquiry. This chapter explores the use of action research as a constructionist and interpretive research method that can be used to provide real insight into pedagogy and andragogy in action. For the purposes of this chapter intersectionality is defined as the intersection of multiple identities. These intersecting identities may include gender, age, race, social class, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, disability (mental and physical) and illness (mental and physical) (Collins, 2015). Inner city schools are a melting pot for these multiple identities and as such can create a rich intersectional environment, an environment that informs and influences both teaching and learning within these contexts.

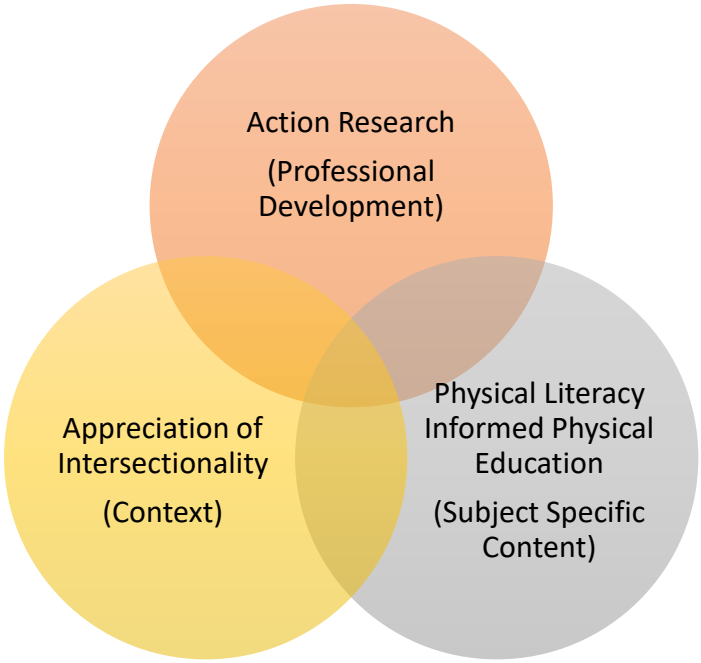
Action Research and Inclusive Physical Education

Classrooms and schools are diverse places. In order to be effective, teachers and education professionals must construct responsive, effective schools and teaching practices that embrace intersectionality and respond to a diversity of students (Howard, 2007). However, the achievement and school outcomes for diverse students is often disparate. Lower expectations for these students and a concentration of less experienced or qualified teachers in high poverty and urban schools are some of the factors that have contributed to the manifestation of educational social inequalities (Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 2011). Effective professional development must address these enduring achievement and opportunity gaps. Without the advantage of effective teachers within these intersectional contexts many students will continue to remain behind (Dwyer, 2007). Therefore, professional development with an emphasis on educational inclusion is essential in order to stop and perhaps close the gap.

Waitoller and Artiles (2013) conducted a systematic review of the international research literature from 2000 until 2009 on professional development for inclusive education. Most of

the studies on professional development for inclusive practice used qualitative methodology and did not include subject specific focus. Waitoller and Artiles (2013) presented a number of key findings from this research but in particular highlighted how the design and examination of professional development should use "*an intersectional approach in which teachers identify and dismantle interesting and multiple barriers to learning and participation for all students*" (p.338). Additionally, Waitoller and Artiles (2013) also suggest that professional development should also address inclusion with a subject specific focus. Thus, this research underscores a need for collaborative, sustained and high quality professional development addressing inclusion that is centred within the context of schools and the subject content; focused on enhancing educational opportunities and achievement for all students. Action research could be used as the professional development tool to bring these two elements together. Figure X below describes how the case study above using action research has addressed improvement in educational practice embracing the intersectional context and subject specific content:

Figure X: Inclusive Educational Practice



Action research as a form of professional development is ideally situated to embrace intersectionality or the teaching and learning context alongside the subject or pedagogical content. More research that holistically embraces educational context and content is required in order to improve teaching effectiveness and student outcomes. And this research is most

needed in educational context with diverse students in order to close achievement and opportunity gaps.

A Paradigm Shift

For constructionist research methods to be valued as much as objective methods an awareness and understanding of ontological and epistemological paradigms are essential. But before we discuss paradigms, it is important to acknowledge that ontological and epistemological positions can be described as the two sides of the same coin. Each are both valuable, but approach, observe, analyse and measure the context of study from different perspectives. This equity in value is not however, shared by all and as a result large scale, objective, positivist, generalisable and mass data studies are often considered as the 'gold standard' in the educational research field. This perception is starting to change as more rigorous qualitative, interpretivist and constructionist studies emerge. Therefore, this chapter does not aim to pitch one paradigm over another, but instead looks to explore what interpretivist and constructionist approaches can add to a historically predominant objectivist and positivist research world.

Ontology is typically categorised into two paradigms these being objectivism and constructionism. Objectivism is an ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors. However, constructionism, which, is often referred to as constructivism, asserts that the social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors (Bryman, 2008). A constructivist approach acknowledges the interconnected nature of the social phenomena and social actors. As Kemmis and MacTaggart (2008, p.277) highlight "*if practices are constituted in social interaction with people, then changing practice is also a social process*". Social interaction is a central component of pedagogy and andragogy and takes place with various social actors including: the teacher and the students, the students and the teacher and the students with one another. The complexity of the nature of social interaction is also compounded in places and spaces (inner city schools) where intersectional identities are constructed and reconstructed. Constructionist methodologies therefore could be considered as an authentic approach to exploring social phenomena as the relationship between social actors and their identities can be recognised within the research.

Epistemology can be defined as the theory of knowledge, and it is used to refer to what can be considered as acceptable or credible knowledge (Bryman, 2008). Epistemology is typically categorised into three main approaches, positivism, realism and interpretivism. Both positivism and realism are more aligned with the ontological position of objectivism.

Positivism advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond (Bryman, 2008). Patton (2002) highlights researchers risk losing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon by staying within a positivist framework that orientates towards generalisability. Realism shares a similar belief as positivism in that the natural and the social sciences can and should apply the same approach to the collection of data. Realism acknowledges a reality independent of the senses that are accessible to the researchers' tools and theoretical speculations. It implies that the categories created by scientists refer to real objects in the natural or social worlds (Bryman, 2008).

Interpretivism is however, more aligned with constructionism. Interpretivism suggests that social and natural research cannot be measured by the same methodology or strategy (Bryman, 2008), and instead should be measured differently from one another. This approach highlights that natural methodologies seek to find natural knowledge and therefore social methodologies should be employed to seek social knowledge. Interpretivism aims to respect and acknowledge the difference between people and objects. Interpretivism emerged as a result of a growing conflict between positivism and hermeneutics, as such interpretivism owes its intellectual heritage to Weber's notion of *Verstehen*, the hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition and symbolic interactionism (Bryman, 2008). Interpretivism looks to understand social phenomena through investigating reality from the perspectives of the beings living, acting and thinking within it (Schultz, 1962). Adopting an interpretivist approach therefore, provides an opportunity to not only observe social phenomena but also appreciate the intersectional elements within the environment.

Action or Lifeworld Enquiry

By observing, analysing and interpreting action you are in effect trying to make sense of lived experiences. Van Manen (1990) highlights how interpretive phenomenological research methods can be very helpful in guiding studies that explain phenomenon and depict the experiences and lifeworld of educational practitioners. In particular, Van Manen (2015) suggests that research methods informed by phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenological can provide insightful methods in observing, analysing and explaining lifeworld experiences. This is especially true when working in contexts where the lifeworld of teachers can be very complex due to multiple identities and intersectionality in contexts where difference and otherness is critical to the study. Phenomenology is generally speaking based on the "*principle that we as human beings give meaning to the world as we perceive it. Objects in the world have no meaning prior to an individual's perception of that feature. [In other*

words], objects are what individuals 'make of them'" (Whitehead, 2010, p.204). This is particularly significant when it comes to educational research, as often the perception of the researcher is taken rather than understanding the perceptions of the teacher, students and researcher. Hermeneutic phenomenology goes one step further in combining perception with theory, reflection and practice (Friesen, Hendriksson and Saevi, 2012). Hermeneutic phenomenology therefore seeks to further understand the phenomena by reflecting and then altering practice informed by previous experience and/or theory.

Research methods that are informed by hermeneutic phenomenology can be used to explore lived experiences that are sensitive to the past, present and future context. They also allow for responsiveness because meaning is found in the lifeworld (action). Often teachers or researchers cannot predict what may or may not happen therefore a research method that is responsive allows for a dynamic approach that allows the researcher to explore the phenomena as it is created. Van Manen (2015) also describes how educators rarely reflect on the fact that meaningful experiences are always infected with the relational and situational elements of the moment in which learning is taking place. A hermeneutic phenomenology research approach would encourage this reflection in relation to contextual and situations aspects of the moment. One such research method that is informed by hermeneutic phenomenology is action research.

Action Research Methodology

Action research, which is also known as participatory action research (PAR), community-based study and co-operative enquiry is an approach commonly used for improving conditions and practices in a range environments (Lingard, et al., 2008 in Whitelaw et al., 2003). There are numerous descriptions of what participatory action research is. Reason and Bradbury (2006) describe action research as an approach, which is used in designing studies, which seek both to inform and influence practice. Action research is also described as a process of systematic inquiry that enables people to find effective solutions to real problems encountered in daily life (Ferrance, 2000 in Stringer, 2008).

Action research provides the means by which people may increase the effectiveness of the work in which they are engaged (Mills, 2011, Lingard et al., 2008, and Stringer, 2008). By focussing on generating specific solutions to practical, localised problems, action research empowers practitioners by getting them to engage with research and the subsequent development or implementation activities (Meyer, 2000). Action research enables researchers to develop a systematic, inquiring approach toward their own practices (Frabutt et al., 2008, Hopkins, 2002) oriented towards effecting positive change in this practice (Holter & Frabutt,

2012 and McKernan, 1996) or within a broader community (Mills, 2011). Action research therefore, can also be incredibly useful when considering difference in sporting and physical activity contexts where there is potential for individuals to be 'othered'. Through repeated cycles of planning, observing, and reflecting, individuals and groups engaged in action research and can implement changes required for improvement (Hine, 2013). Likewise researches can also potentially be very aware of potential issues of othering of individuals and groups in projects.

Action research is also ideal for exploring contexts with complex pedagogical structures. Complex pedagogical structures are those that present intricate additional factors that affect the learning environment or teaching practice within education. Complexities may include, engaging disaffected students, connecting philosophy, theory and practice, developing teacher reflexivity, promoting learner autonomy, encouraging personalised and inclusive practice. In particular, action research can be ideal for working with complexities that are particularly prominent in individual young people, and teachers where issues around difference and otherness are present.

Action research can be used as a method of systematic enquiry that can be employed to capture, analyse and reflect upon data to improve future practice. Action research is a powerful research method that can provide insight into the complex psychological, sociological and intersectional identity processes that exist within the teaching and learning environment and provide a clear structure for improving practice.

Meyer (2000) states that action research's strength lies in its focus on generating solutions to practical problems and its ability to empower practitioners, by getting them to engage with research and the subsequent development or implementation activities. Meyer states that practitioners can choose to research their own practice or an outside researcher can be engaged to help to identify any problems, seek and implement practical solutions, and systematically monitor and reflect on the process and outcomes of change. In other words action research should be cyclical in nature, processing one aspect at a time and then using the knowledge gained to inform the next cycle. The main premise of action research outlines that "if practices are constituted in social interaction with people, then changing practice is also a social process" (Kemmis and Mactaggart, 2008, p.277). Kemmis and McTaggart (2000, p.595) describe action research as a process of reflective cycles of:

- Planning a change.

- Acting and observing the process and consequences of the change.
- Reflecting on these processes and consequences and then re-planning.
- Acting and observing.
- Reflecting.
- And repeating this process.

In reality, the process may not be as neat as the illustrated spiral of self-contained cycles of planning, acting and observing, and reflecting that it suggests. This is particularly true in contexts where otherness is at play and complex identity issue of otherness further complicate enquiry processes. These stages are anticipated to overlap, and initial plans will quickly become obsolete in the light of learning from the evolving process and experience. The action research process is likely to be more fluid, open, and responsive. As highlighted by Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) participatory action research has three distinct phases that are key to its success, these being the phases of planning, acting and/or observing and reflecting. This process can therefore encourage practitioners to think critically especially in relation to difference and othering as well as elements of their own practice.

Planning

Chevalier and Buckles (2013) suggests that in order to navigate in perilous times, we must learn the rules of navigation, plan our journey, prepare ourselves to cope with the uncertainty and tame the unknown. Failing to plan the process equals planning to fail in the process. Anticipating the future is all the more important when clear links between actions and their effects can be established and trusted. It is appreciated that planning cannot nor does not always account for all eventualities. But planning does have a mediating effect on the quality of teaching and learning and enables the action research process to have a tangible piece of data to unpack.

Acting / Observing

Robson (2002) identifies two main types of observation, participant and structured observation, these types are not mutually exclusive as there are also many examples in-between. Participant observation takes place when the observer has a role within the observed group for example the teacher. Structured observation is observation that takes place by a detached observer for example a researcher without a specific role in the lesson (Robson, 2002). When observing

however it is important that this act in itself does not 'other' young people involved and acknowledge labels and constructs used for example, traveller children, single parent families, children with special educational needs. Observation needs to be sensitive and responsive to the context.

Reflecting

Loughran (1996) describes reflection as the purposeful and deliberate act of thinking about ways in which to respond to problematic situations within teaching and learning. Action research takes this concept further by not only reflecting on situations but also striving to improve these situations. This could be considered a method that seeks to implement a radical pedagogical approach by trying to overcome the barriers of what 'is' in the pursuit of what could 'be'.

The act of reflection is a topic that has been widely researched with a number of scholars presenting their own reflective models including, Kolb (1984), Gibbs (1988), Schon (1993) and Rolfe et al., (2001). The use of a reflective model may support teachers and the researcher in conducting critical reflections that aims to understand critically the previous lesson and thus make informed choices about the revisions that need to be implemented for the next lesson. However, the purpose of reflection needs to be identified this will then colour the reflections taking place. For example, reflection is often considered within education from a purely teaching and learning focus, this approach is often insensitive to the context and the individuals therein. Appreciating the context from the perspectives of the individuals, including teachers and students can facilitate deeper reflection and uncover issues relating to difference and othering as well as understanding multiple identities. It can also reveal emancipatory issues experienced by the teacher and can empowerment the teachers themselves to enact change.

Engaging in Action Research

There are many positives in engaging in action research. One advantage it that it encourages teachers to become reflective practitioners. Van Manen (2015) highlights that effective practitioners need to develop an intuitive or phenomenological reflexivity that helps them understand the lived meanings of phenomena or experiences in a child or young person's life. Action research can promote just this by involving teachers in the action research process. In doing so the teacher can also generate a sense of 'ownership' of new ideas and practices, rather than mere program 'buy-in' (Wagner, 2001). Also, it allows researchers to investigate education in an authentic way, observing and analysing teaching and learning as it happens.

Action research can also be problematic. Issues can arise if you do not obtain school, teacher, student or researcher buy-in. For action research to be truly successful it requires at least the teacher and the researchers' full commitment to the process. This can be difficult if the perceived value of the research is under question or there is a fragile relationship between the researcher and the teacher, or if the process reveals difficult and complex issues, especially when working in contexts (inner city schools) where difference and otherness feature. Another potential issue with action research is making sense of the process in relation to data analysis and representation.

Analysing and Presenting Action Research Findings

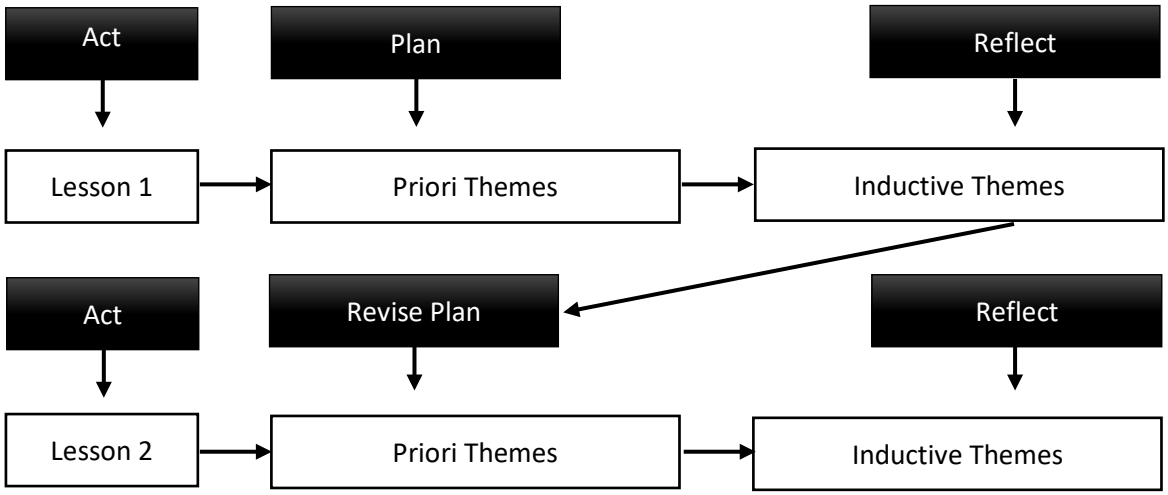
The researcher needs to identify a data analysis framework and describe the logical steps and processes taken in of arranging the data in order to support the credibility of the action research (Atkinson & Delamont, 2005; Morse, 1994; Thorne, 2000). The researcher and potentially the teacher must to follow a disciplined approach and reflect upon the appropriate meanings of the data and the social action which is being explored (Atkinson & Delamont, 2005; Walker et al., 2008). Thorne (2000, p.68) highlights that if a framework is not discussed then it is left to be assumed that the researcher "*left the raw data out overnight and awoke to find that the data analysis fairies had organised the data into a coherent new structure that explained everything!"* Therefore, it is understood that using a defined approach, and describing the logical steps and processes of arranging the data would support the credibility of this research (Atkinson & Delamont, 2005; Morse, 1994). Within action research this may involve the teacher in varying degrees if the process is being undertaken with a researcher the researcher may analyse the findings independently of the teacher, however, it would be advised that in order for the teacher to be fully informed and therefore more able to reflect and respond accordingly researcher should share their analysis with the teacher after each cycle. This could take the form of a lesson reflection where the teacher and researcher share their perspectives on the lesson. There are many ways action research could be analysed one effective method is thematic analysis.

Action Research and Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis can be very useful when analysing action research because of the feature of priori and inductive themes. Priori themes are those that come from the characteristics of the phenomenon being studied; from already agreed on professional definitions found in the literature; from local common-sense constructs; and from researchers' values, theoretical

orientations, and personal experiences (Bulmer 1979; Strauss 1987; Maxwell 1996). Whereas, inductive themes are those that emerge from the data. Therefore, priori themes can be identified prior to the lesson as the focus for improvement or observation and inductive themes used as a result of the phenomena that emerge during the lesson. Figure X illustrates how priori and inductive themes can be used in-line with the action research process.

Figure X: Action Research and Priori and Inductive Themes



Using thematic analysis in this manner allows for the creation systematic and robust research process that is informed by hermeneutic phenomenology whilst being able to return data in a form that able to be analysed. Thematic analysis is very good for exploring 'what' has happened but not necessarily 'why' or 'how' this phenomenon has happened. Another research analysis method that seeks to describe the journey of the action research may be better placed to do this, one such research analysis method is narrative analysis.

Action Research and Narrative Analysis

Narrative inquiry and analysis has been influenced by many philosophers, anthropologists, and psychotherapists including Dewey, Johnson, Geertz, Bateson, Czarniawska, Coles, and Polkinghorne (Clandinin and Connolly, 2001). The theoretical underpinning of narrative inquiry and analysis is the belief that "*telling a story about oneself* [or others] *involves telling a story about choice and action, which have integrally moral and ethical dimensions*" (Rice and Ezzy 1999: 126). This form of research represents a change in focus from individual meanings to cultural narratives and their influence on people's lives (Byrne-Armstrong 2001). The aim of narrative inquiry is therefore not to find one generalisable truth but to identify many truths or narratives (Byrne-Armstrong 2001). Narrative inquiry and analysis therefore will explore and describe the action research process in relation to the unique individual journey of the teacher, research or both as a rich story.

The use of thematic analysis or narrative analysis are two possible ways to make sense of the data collected by action research. These methods are very acceptable in the academic and research field however, if action research aims to involve the teacher and the participants in the research another analysis method may be more accessible to the teaching profession or student audience enabling al aspects of the research to be shared with the participants. This method of analysis is creative nonfiction.

The Action Research Difference

Action research is different because it places the participant/s at the center of the research. By placing participants at the center of the research it encourages the research to appreciate the individual holistically, in relation to who they are and the environment and context they work within. From this perspective exploration of the lifeworld and the social phenomena experienced therein, can also embrace the intersectional nature of social interaction. Action research is also an inclusive research methodology as it is focused on the individual action research journey of each participant. With each journey being quite unique to the individual participant. This can lead to participants feeling empowered as the research is meaningful to them responding to their specific needs and in that they have an element of autonomy in guiding where the research goes. In particular teachers, themselves can be empowered to voice their opinions and recommendations to the schools' senior leadership team as a result of engaging in action research, this can lead to better communication between leadership and teachers at the 'coal face'. This two way communication is essential because teachers are often marginalized and can be left of out significant decision making or strategic decisions without being consulted or provided with the opportunity to give input or feedback. Action research can empower teachers to do just this. This can lead to participants actively being supported in becoming the change agents to their own practice and developing the tools and confidence in order to improve their practice.

Action research can also be an informed and systematic method to reveal emancipatory issues within practice as they may inductively present themselves in either the action, planning or reflection stages. When an awareness of an emancipatory issue is uncovered this provides a natural opportunity to explore, challenge and more importantly change factors that may hinder practice. In fact, both empowerment and emancipation were two themes that were identified in the following case study.

Case Study: Action Research as a Form of Professional Development

As part of a PhD to 'Operationalise Physical Literacy' (Durden-Myers, 2017) action research was used to develop teaching practice as a professional development tool. Fourteen teachers were included in the action research from three different schools. Each of the schools that were used in the case study were from inner city settings (Manchester and Bristol) and were considered to be intersectional contexts where multiple identities constituted the student body. Teacher information is outlined in Table X below:

Table X: Action Research Participants

Primary School, Manchester	**Secondary School, Manchester**	**Secondary School, Bristol**
Stephen, Assistant Head, Year 5/6 Primary School Teacher.	Charlie, Head of PE, Secondary School PE Teacher.	Isla, Head of PE, Secondary School PE Teacher.
Amy, ICT Lead, Year 5/6 Primary School Teacher.	Sarah, Deputy Head of PE, Secondary School PE Teacher.	Jodie, Secondary School PE Teacher.
Olivia, Year 5/6 Primary School Teacher.	Joe, Secondary School PE Teacher.	Dave, Secondary School PE Teacher.
	Adam, Secondary School PE Teacher.	Luke, Secondary School PE Teacher.
	Jamie, Secondary School PE Teacher.	Andy, Secondary School PE Teacher.
	Anne-Marie, Secondary School PE Teacher.	

Each teacher engaged in a number of action research cycles ranging from a minimum of six cycles to a maximum of twelve cycles. On completion of the action research a closing interview was conducted with participants. As part of this closing interview the researcher asked the following question: 'What will you take away from the physical literacy professional development (Action Research)?' The participants responses are categorised into the following themes: Empowerment; Reflection and Reflexivity; Emancipation Awareness and Philosophical and Pedagogical Change. These themes are explored in more detail as follows:

Empowerment

Action research can be used as a tool to empower teachers and practitioners. This can be seen in the responses from Sarah and Charlie below:

> Participant: “One thing I want to do is instil it more… we've been looking at growth mind-set so I've sent an email off, to our department about looking at growth mind-set, so it ties in with the physical literacy” (Sarah, Deputy Head of PE, Secondary School PE Teacher.)

Sarah has used the experience of action research as a catalyst to prompt the design of more professional development looking at embedding and nurturing a growth mind-set within the department. Charlie has also found a renewed enthusiasm to explore theory and practice.

> Participant: “Enthusiasm to explore it further and embed it into my practice. It's certainly sparked curiosity and it's made me kind of assess what my understanding was. I think a lot of it I was doing, but I was doing without understanding what it was. And I think it's important to understand and have a more intimate knowledge of what it is, and how it should shape what we do as a department and as a school. So, I want to kind of go away, like I've said before, go away, review it, look at it, and it's quite nice because I can think about, and I can use it, as a bed rock to looking at Key Stage 3 assessment, looking at Key Stage 3 curriculum and the journey in PE as a whole across the five years. The extracurricular offer and how we engage with the community” (Charlie, Head of PE, Secondary School PE Teacher).

Charlie’s response clearly describes how an action research experience with one class has empowered him to apply physical literacy as a concept more widely across the whole student journey including all five years (year 7-11), improving the extra-curricular offer and exploring engagement within the community. Empowerment can take the form of grand plans such as Sarah’s or Charlies account or on a smaller scale as seen in Adam renewed appreciation to challenge how he approaches his and other teacher’s lessons.

> Participant: “Well what I’ll take away from it is looking at lessons in different ways so looking at different approaches I can have within the lesson, can I do that, well this

didn't work right ok I’m going to try this model, watching different teachers and learning about what I can employ that and the sort of the questioning I use and how I speak to the children” (Adam, Secondary School PE Teacher)

Reflection and Reflexivity

Improved reflection and reflexivity emerged as a theme in response to the researcher’s question, this is perhaps not surprising considering the nature of action research and its focus on reflection to inform planning and action. What was surprising however, was the improved intentionality as a result of engaging in more a sophisticated level of reflection and reflexivity.

Participant: **“**Loads, really. Definitely thinking more about what you're doing and not doing as...before I was just trying to hit a lot of tick boxes thinking "Oh, they can do this." But it's more about the path of how they got there, rather than what they can do at the end of it (Anne-Marie, Secondary School PE Teacher)”.

This was an interesting point made by Anne-Marie, action research has enabled her to see beyond isolated lessons and has encouraged lessons to be linked into a series of interrelated lessons that contribute towards a learning journey. This is a more intentional approach to planning and therefore teaching and learning. Reflection prompted by action research can also lead to an awareness of current emancipation and then in turn how this can be combatted or challenged.

Emancipation Awareness

Reflecting on a single event such as a lesson can also prompt wider reflection, and raise questions regarding philosophy, practice and purpose. This is highlighted in Andy’s response to the researchers question below:

Participant: “The reflection element. It will be the biggest one for me. I mean, you've got more time for everything in this school, to do anything...even with me doing this interview right now it's stressing me out just because I've got all sorts going on at the end of the year. But, how do you get...if we could factor in some time to ensure that...We've never shared any practice this year. There's enough time for people, let's just go and play table tennis and share how do you teach the serve, how do you teach the backhand push. Dave is a rugby player, he's played for however knows long, can he

> show us some rugby drills? I've played basketball, Luke played football, Isla was netball, Joe... You know, we've all got different strengths but we never share it enough. And they talk about sharing practice being so important and going to watch other teachers. And fair enough, they've got a good program here called Open Classroom where you can go and watch other teachers, but that's looking at behaviour engagement different strategies in classrooms never specific to PE" (Andy, Secondary School PE Teacher).

This highlights how current professional development programmes in school are often whole school centric focusing on general teaching and learning concepts. Engaging in the action research process for Andy has highlighted how there is very little subject specific professional development despite the school rhetoric of valuing the sharing best practice. This highlights a disconnect between rhetoric and reality which has put the spotlight on an area that could be explored further. Another issue that was brought to light by two teachers was the focus on theoretical physical education to the detriment of practical or core PE.

> Participant: "I feel refreshed in my practical teaching, definitely. And I feel more focused on core PE and that we should hold on to the principals of core PE. And, you know, whatever we do to try and improve the outcomes when they get to Year 11 it shouldn't compromise the principals of core PE. So that one thing. Yeah, I definitely notice that even if I spend an extra three minutes planning my practical lesson thinking about making sure that I've kind of addressed the key areas of physical literacy that my lessons...the students are enjoying them more and I'm enjoying teaching them more, it just feels a bit fresher. It's been really good, I really enjoyed it". (Isla, Head of PE, Secondary School PE Teacher)

Isla in her response above has recognised that there is a tension between core PE and examination PE, and how perhaps in the past core PE has been determinately been affected by this. This is supported by Joe's response who also recognises how there is a tendency to focus on theory rather than practical and how the main aim of PE should be to promote physical activity throughout life.

> Participant: "erm, probably the main bulk of understanding about the different theories and things that we've talked about and ensuring that students are physically active and

> can go onto being physically active throughout their life and developing the knowledge and understanding through more of a practical sense rather than always through theory". (Joe, Secondary School PE Teacher)

Again, these two statements (Isla and Joe) highlight a possible area that needs further investigation or to be challenged in relation to the purpose of physical education.

Philosophical or Pedagogical Change

The half of responses (n=7) to the researcher's question alluded to a change in philosophical or pedagogical approach. This theme is categorised into three sub-themes: Behaviour Change, Motivational Climate and Purposeful Planning.

Behaviour Change

Stephen, Jodie and Amy all articulate how their approach to PE has now changed or how they will not revert back to how they used to teach. This suggested that physical education teacher education (PETE) does not necessarily prepare teachers for working in challenging intersectional environments were multiple identities, difference and othering is encountered as part of the school culture. The action research process has combined theory and practice which has enabled these teachers to challenge their previous approach to teaching PE and implement a new approach.

> Participant: "The first thing is the change to my own personal teaching of PE. It has to change having gone through this background of physical literacy and then the different elements that we're trying to build within children. I've now got a better understanding of why it needs to change as well. And then, from a school point of view, I think we could be very brave with physical literacy and, as I've said, we're revamping our curriculum and changing it" (Stephen, Assistant Head, Year 5/6 Primary School Teacher).

> Participant: "I will definitely repeat the same athletic lessons I did next year. I wouldn't go back to what I used to do, I would carry on with that process keeping it quite broad. I'd just be interested to know how Isla did it in rounders, what the difference was; because I took running, jumping, you know, skills like that, you could not teach that broadly and have it relate to other things. So if I was doing like batting in rounders

> I'm not sure how it would link, but I'm sure there is a way" (Jodie, Secondary School PE Teacher).
>
> Participant: "The fact that I now just approach PE totally differently, in the way that we plan PE. And the fact that now I know that if the kids aren't motivated and confident, and engaged and want to be in that lesson, then they're not going to develop the skills. So, yeah, doing that bit first" (Amy, ICT Lead, Year 5/6 Primary School Teacher).

Amy in her response above highlights an increased focus on student motivation this was also highlighted by two other teachers who placed an increased emphasis on creating a motivational climate within lessons.

Motivational Climate

Both Dave and Luke in their responses highlight how motivation and engagement is now of an increased focus.

> Participant: "The main thing is the developing kids' understanding of what motivates them and how they can try and motivate themselves intrinsically to try and participate in physical activity for life; and trying different strategies that will help that" (Dave, Secondary School PE Teacher).
>
> Participant: "Little strategies, thinking about the structure of the lesson, grouping of students, and making sure that the activities that I'm doing are engaging and motivating most of the time" (Luke, Secondary School PE Teacher).

This draws attention to how action research can be used to address elements of current teaching practice that may be being neglected. Both of these teachers were very competent and proficient at developing student's physical competence but this was sometimes to the detriment to student engagement and autonomy, hence perhaps their increased focus on creating a motivational climate. Planning was also highlighted by two teachers.

Purposeful Planning

Both Jamie and Olivia commented on how their planning for physical education lessons had changed and become more purposeful.

> Participant: “I think it's been a great success in terms of just increasing my awareness of why do I plan each drill, what benefit that's going to have on the students, the lesson, and obviously the game...What's the importance of that, what the students are going to gain essentially from this; is it communication, is it thinking skills, is it problem solving? So, it's just increased my knowledge all round, so just of why I'm planning for this and what the effects of this are on the lesson. You know, keep relating to the game and just thinking of the purpose of each drill” (Jamie, Secondary School PE Teacher).

This is similar to the intentionality mentioned earlier in the reflection section. Jamie articulates how his planning is now more intentional in that he questions what the purpose of each activity is and what effect this will have on the pupils. Similarly, Olivia, mentions how her planning has changed to promote engagement, progress and physical activity levels.

> Participant: “I think it's changed the way I approach planning a lesson, I’d always start now making sure that they are active for as long as possible and then go from there, rather than doing stuff they're not interested in, base it around games and making sure that like every child has success in a lesson, because then they'll want to do it more” (Olivia, Year 5/6 Primary School Teacher).

Case Study: Conclusion

This case study has provided a brief overview of the findings of just one question within a closing interview after teachers engaged in professional development involving action research. The case study has highlighted how action research can be used as an inclusive and immersive research methodology that places the participants at the centre of the research. Action research can be shown to encourage practitioners to explore their lifeworld as it happens (in action) and make informed insights into their own practice and their wider context.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has encouraged the reader to explore what may be possible when reverting from an objective ‘birds eye view’ approach in favour of an interpretivist ‘immersive’ approach to educational research. Exploring educational practice in action can be incredibly powerful in understanding the complexities involved in teaching and learning. By understanding the lifeworld as it unfolds enables researchers and teachers alike to bridge the gap between research

and practice and provide a platform for meaningful and effective educational research and practice. Action research can be used as an effective research methodology that enables the researcher and participants to explore the lifeworld in action. And provides a methodology that allows for immersion in the research context whilst retaining a framework to ensure research trustworthiness. Moreover, action research can be used as a research methodology that seamlessly intertwines theory and practice. As Van Manen (1997) highlights, theory allows us to 'think' about the world, and practice allows us to 'grasp' the world. Therefore, action research could be an ideal research method for encouraging practitioners to not only 'think' but 'grasp' an understanding of lifeworld phenomena as observed in action, whilst simultaneously appreciating and responding to the intersectional nature of the research context. It is essential that teachers and researchers do not cause their participants to be 'othered' when engaging in research or reflective practice, and that the research methods employed embrace difference, and are sensitive to intersectionality and otherness. This chapter proposes that action research when approached mindfully, including a thoughtfulness to difference and othering, that it can be an ideal tool for sensitively conducting research in complex and challenging contexts.

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