

## CHAPTER 5

### **GENERATING SPACES FOR SHARING**

#### *Communicating about and Representing the Outcomes of Action Research*

After completing data collection, analysis, and interpretation, it is important to consider how you will share what you have learned with others. Creating a “space” for writing and identifying the “spaces” for sharing the outcomes of your research are critical. While one of the main reasons we conduct action research is to inform our current and future practice, and our understanding of that practice, it is equally important to share this knowledge with others. Cochran-Smith & Lytle (2009) describe the knowledge that practitioners generate through inquiry as local knowledge of practice. They reject the traditional notion that there are only two types of knowledge that inform our understanding of teaching – formal or professional knowledge and practical knowledge. Formal knowledge is generally considered that which is produced through conventional research by researchers; it is conceptual knowledge about education, teaching, and learning that has potential for generalization and meets the criteria for validity and reliability. Practical knowledge, in contrast, involves using one’s wisdom of teaching to make decisions and judgments in concrete situations that arise during the teaching process. This wisdom may often be tacit and not easily articulated. “Local knowledge of practice” then, is generated by action researchers working collaboratively in communities as they “theorize and construct their work” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 2009, p. 131). It is relevant to the local context, but can also be publicly shared with many others, such as school-based colleagues, university-based educators and researchers, parents, K-12 students, and those in other professional settings. It is knowledge that can be “borrowed, interpreted, and reinvented in other local contexts” (p. 132). This chapter will discuss considerations and decisions that need to be made prior to sharing action research outcomes, as well as possible formats that may be adopted for dissemination.

#### CONSIDERATIONS PRIOR TO SHARING

Prior to sharing the outcomes of your research with others, Sagor (2005) suggests you consider the audience, purpose, and degree of detail required. This will help you to determine the appropriate format for sharing your work. Each of these considerations is described below.

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### *The Audience*

Sagor identified several potential audiences for communicating research: a) Immediate audience (parents and students), b) Immediate colleagues (other teachers or practitioners at your grade level or those who teach the same subject(s), c) Other educators in the same context (others in your school, school district, province or state), or d) The larger educational community (all K-12 educators, policy-makers, and teacher educators and researchers). Each teacher described in the chapters 6 to 9 of this book, in addition to informing their own practice, shared the outcomes of their research with school-based colleagues at the same grade level. Their final research reports, a component of the expectations of participating in a three-year externally-funded project that I spearheaded, were shared with their principals and the local school districts, while other teachers who participated in the same project presented at local and/or national conferences.

### *The Purpose*

The reasons for disseminating your research outcomes need to be determined. The outcomes of action research and their subsequent dissemination may be used for many purposes, such as informing decisions on future action (e.g. changes to classroom-based practice or school-based policy). An action research report may be required if the research is externally funded; decisions about future funding may be dependent on the report. Other action researchers may decide to write a paper for a professional or scholarly journal. In other instances, teachers may have participated in an action research project as a requirement for obtaining a university credit, thereby needing to produce a final report.

### *The Degree of Detail*

Once you have identified the audience(s) for the outcomes of your action research, this will determine the degree of detail that you will need to share. For example, if you decide to prepare a short article for a professional or scholarly journal, you will need to visit the home page of the targeted journal to determine submission requirements, such as length of the article and nature of the content required. If you consider publication in *Science and Children*, a National Science Teachers' Association publication (see [www.nsta.org/elementaryschool/](http://www.nsta.org/elementaryschool/)), you need to check the link for authors contributing to this peer-reviewed journal. This provides information about the purpose of the journal, the types of content it publishes, and how the manuscript should be presented.

If you are sharing with a group of parents at a school information session, they may not require a great amount of detail about the methods and procedures used in the study. Conversely, if you were preparing a manuscript for a scholarly journal, considerable detail about the study design would need to be included.

## FORMATS FOR SHARING OUTCOMES

The outcomes of action research may be shared in many formats. In my work with action research groups, I always encourage teachers to complete an action research report. Writing becomes a form of reflection and, as such, provides a means to make further sense of the study. Writing is time-consuming, and thus will require a concerted effort on your part to build time into your professional activities for writing. Mills (2003), recognizing the importance of writing for the action researcher, provides several persuasive reasons for writing – clarifying and reflecting on many aspects of the study, generating new research questions that will inform the next cycle of action research, empowering the researcher to be an advocate for change in the classroom, producing a product that can be shared with others, and instilling a sense of accomplishment in the action researcher. The format for final reports that I usually recommend to teacher action researchers includes the following components:

- Title: This should clearly and concisely reflect the focus of the study.
- Abstract: This is a brief description of the purpose of the research, the research design, and the outcomes of the study.
- Introduction: This sets the context for what is to follow. Why is this study important?
- Research focus and research questions: This is necessary if the reader is to make sense of subsequent components of the report.
- Context of the study: This provides details about the school, students, and your own experience/beliefs about teaching and learning as they relate to the focus of the study.
- Relevant literature: This presents an overview of the literature and theories that informed your study.
- Study design: This outlines the methods and sources used in data collection, how you approached data analysis and interpretation, and the criteria adopted for ensuring the study was trustworthy.
- Outcomes of the study: This may be presented in several ways – as themes, data tables, metaphors, or stories. Remember to support claims with quotes from the data!
- Implications: This allows you to reflect and report on why this study is significant. How will it inform your own thinking and classroom practice? How might it benefit others who work in similar contexts? How can educators from the broader educational community benefit from this work?
- Next steps: This describes additional questions that you would like to consider. They may then become the basis for the next cycle of an action research project. How will you find answers to new questions? Will you continue to use the resources and pedagogical approaches adopted in the study? Will others join your action research group?

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- References: This includes citations of quoted work or the ideas of others that you have used. In education, citations most often adopt the protocol of the American Psychological Association for writing conventions (see <http://library.concordia.ca/help/howto/apa.php>).
- Modifications of this format may be adopted for writing purposes. Keep in mind, as suggested earlier, the audience, the purpose for reporting, and the degree of detail you need to provide to the targeted audience when sharing what you have learned through action research.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Identify the possible audiences for sharing the outcomes of your action research.
- Choose one of these audiences.
- What is the best format to adopt in sharing with this particular audience?
- What types of detail need to be shared with this audience?