THE MEDIUM TERM IMPACT OF AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT ON TEACHER ADOPTION OF ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: Exploring the teachers’ sense of themselves as researchers.

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Background

The author was the ‘principal investigator’ - a university tutor subsequently referred to as the ‘investigator’ in this paper - leading a programme of research alongside six teachers – referred to as the ‘participants’ - in a selective state secondary school in the north of England – referred to as ‘AR Grammar School’. The aim of the programme of research was to develop responses to the needs of induction in the sixth form using Action Research methodology – referred to as AR. The programme ran from July 2009 until August 2010. This paper explores the teachers’ sense of themselves as researchers.

Postholm (2009), in a Norwegian study, argues that teachers can become researchers through involvement in an AR project, but that this takes time and must have proven benefits to the teacher. Gewirtz et. al. (2009), in analyzing the purposes, processes and experiences of teacher research in a case study, found that developing a culture of research amongst teachers requires the rethinking of assumptions about what it means to be a teacher. They argue that part of this rethinking involved teacher perceptions of the intrinsic and instrumental value of research related activities. Day et al (2006) in an exploration of the complex, fragmented and multiple nature of secondary teacher identity argue that the values associated with a positive identity can be negatively affected by situation specific events (p614). Beijaard throws some light on these by drawing on the work of Sikes (Day et al pp 605-606) to distinguish three important aspects of a secondary teacher’s identity: the subject that they teach, their relationship with pupils, and how they see their role as teachers. This small-scale research focuses on the influence of subject departments and their perception of their role as teachers. Visscher and Witzers (2004) assert that research into subject departments is scarce, whilst
arguing that subject departments may become powerful agents influencing teacher development (p787), suggesting that the relationship between subject departments, and teacher development can offer insight into the development of teachers as Action Researchers.

**Focus of the enquiry**

This paper evaluates, the contribution of an Action Research project to the practice of six teachers (practitioners) in the subject areas of Chemistry (Ch 1 and Ch 2), History (Hi), Modern Foreign Languages (MFL 1 and MFL 2) and Social Science (Soc) and explores factors influencing their relationship to Action Research.

**Research Methods**

Data collection draws on the experiences of Postholm (2009: p556). Data is collected from teacher written submissions for the transition project, the principal investigator’s research diary, a series of semi-structured interviews, written teacher reflections, AR participant presentation to school colleagues, and respondent validity of the principal investigator’s findings.

**Analytical and theoretical framework**

The principal investigator was influenced by earlier work on the values of secondary school teachers (Butroyd 2007, Butroyd 2008, Huberman 1989, Nias 1989). Dewey’s (1966) conceptions of instrumental and intrinsic value, and the concepts of the situational and substantial self, are used as the analytical framework. Dilemma analysis (Winter 1982), allied to Mason’s (1996) procedure of identifying a puzzle, working backwards and forwards from the dilemma, were used to explore for further evidence and explanation. In addition, the nature of the teacher’s sense of themselves as Action Researchers was explored through Visscher and Witzers (2004) five indicators of departments as professional communities. Respondent validity was built into the analytical process. The findings are presented through six brief case studies, followed by a summary discussion.
The Practitioners

Mrs Gellatly: MFL (1): AR focus - Developing grammar in Spanish

Mrs. Gellatly was an Advanced Skills Teacher for MFL and a mentor for the Graduate Teaching Programme with six years teaching experience. She had previously had experience as a primary outreach teacher and had taught in three secondary schools. In addition, she had taught a one-year adult education Spanish course and had spent one year teaching as an English language assistant in France.

Mrs. Gellatly quickly found allies within the AR project. In early November she said she was going to integrate Mrs. Milne’s work into her spring term work. She enjoyed the opportunity afforded by the project to work with Mrs. Milne (MFL) and Mrs. Sachs (Psychology) because they were ‘serious about it – like-minded people.’ Working together took a particular form as her preferred way of working was to work ‘on my own. I like to set out my stall. I like working with Mrs. Milne because she works this way too.’ This form of working was not collaboration, but rather a sharing of ideas worked out before hand, implementing them individually, and reviewing the impact of the ideas on her individual classes. There was common interest as Mrs. Gellatly and Mrs. Milne taught some of the same classes different languages. Mrs Gellatly had previous positive experiences of what she called ‘joint working’.

Because of new the KS3 (3 years ago), there was a cross Lea working party – to develop material to be disseminated, to make sure things are embedded, sharing ideas so that we are not re-inventing the wheel. The LEA is brilliant for languages – and this is a forward thinking department. Not everybody is but we are lucky here, everyone is of the same mindset. Within the department, with the new GCSE this year, we have had to coordinate schemes of work so that pupils who study two languages are not confused.

She described this way of working with enthusiasm:

*What do you share with these teachers? Ideas that work well…Resources…Students; we have a common-joint approach. What have you learnt from these teachers? My way isn’t the only way – or the best way!*

She made it clear that she shared common values with her close colleagues: ‘Professionalism, honesty, thoroughness, that pupils understand what they’re doing and why.’ She recognized tension between these values and some of the values emanating from the department and the wider school.

*What values are important to the department/faculty? Same. Exam results, learning by rote sometimes.*

Mrs. Gellatly was comfortable with this tension:
(The department is) very open, everyone has a chance to be involved, not dictatorial. We all have a similar approach...Lots of discussion, we all had input, it’s a lovely department it really is. We have respect for the HoH. **How would you describe the school’s management style?** Strong, good, a lot of people would not agree. They do demand a lot of us but that is to maintain the status. They are right to do what they do. (Target grade not below a ‘B’) – inspires – you would see slippage ...I realise I may be contradicting myself. They are approachable and professional...I call the head MR...depends on your own point of view. I’m old fashioned. A boss is the boss.

As with the other participants, her priority was her classes, and on a small number of occasions she asked to re-arrange or cut short AR sessions in order to attend to this priority. However, she was very committed to the project, being one of the first of the participants to write up her project for the draft report. Unlike some of the participants she did manage to consult reading recommended by the investigator, and also referred to other work on cognitive abilities to aid her with the project. She also read a language learning journal. In common with other participants she found the university library portal difficult. She did not use it and never ‘got to grips with Metalib.’ She found reading one of the most difficult aspects of the project, along with maintaining motivation ‘because of time constraints.’ The least satisfying aspect of the project was ‘Simply finding the time to do it – but worth the time – not a complaint about the project. Just workload in general.’ One of the most satisfying aspects for her was collaborating: ‘I think pupils feel special in that so much interest was being taken in their class and their progress,’ and another aspect was their (pupil) results, progression throughout the year due to interventions.’

When asked about her future development Mrs. Gellatly recognized the importance of the AR project to her future professional development, as ‘it’s good practice’. It is the relationship to practice that is valued.

**Mrs. Milne: MFL (2): AR focus – Devising vocabulary learning strategies.**

Mrs. Milne was a teacher of French, German and Russian. She had experience of three secondary schools, including AR Grammar School, experience of teaching at the British International School in Moscow and had been a language assistant in France. She worked closely with Mrs Gellatly, meeting with her regularly to discuss the AR project and other matters of common interest.

Regular, half term...other day for Mrs. Gellatly on the VLE – we share other (MFL) classes with other teachers – they are taught two languages...through resources, email and training...we share some of the same views.
They met partly for instrumental reasons, shared classes for example, but Mrs. Milne spoke about working and meeting socially with other teachers in the department and the school for more intrinsic reasons.

**…What do you share with these teachers?…**

*interests: love of learning, Arts. What do you have in common with these teachers?…Sense of humour; attitude towards current affairs…value of education outside of school. What have you learnt from these teachers? To trust the way I teach, trust my own ideas; enthusiasm.

Mrs. Milne’s shares more than common interests, but also common values, with these colleagues, values related to the substantial self, values such as humour, values underpinning attitudes towards current affairs as well the intrinsic value of education. This aspect of intrinsic value manifested itself in another, interesting way, through the extra curricular activity of showing Soviet era cartoons, so that students could develop their understanding of Russian culture.

When describing her own interest in the AR project Mrs. Milne and Mrs Gellatly used similar phrases to express their views of their own development and the development of their pupils. Both talked about extending learning ‘outside the box’, and beyond targets. Intrinsic values were a strong feature of Mrs. Milne’s perspective on being a teacher.

**What values are important to you as a teacher?**

Enjoyment…Curiosity…To be always learning…Independence.

Tension was expressed between her values, the values she found in her subject and those she shared with other colleagues, and some of the values of the department and the school.

**What values are important to your subject?**

Having an open mind – Learning skills that are applied elsewhere – Learning to communicate. **What values are important to the department?** Results: trying to create uniformity. **What values are important to the school?** Results.

Although this tension was expressed quite clearly it did not emerge as stressful. As with Mrs. Gellatly, tension was accepted as a challenge, even as an opportunity, not as a conflict between ‘good’ or ‘bad’ constructs. Both aspects of teaching were there to be addressed, with values such as curiosity sometimes pursued through extra curricular activities, as are outlined in these research notes.

1.5 hours after school watching Russian – Winnie the Pooh cartoons – digression from the lesson, encouraging curiosity, watching old Soviet cartoons and learning about Russian culture.
Participating in the AR project did encourage her to read, particularly ‘journals – ordinarily I wouldn’t’ but reading was not a feature of her draft report. She found reading and setting aside time for writing difficult, completing her draft report on her own after initial support from the principal investigator.

The most satisfying aspects of the project for her were,

- collecting data, interviewing, discussing with students, devising activities – which were more successful with classes, and that I will use again next year: seeing the (nearly) final product.

Despite the value she felt the AR project added to her classroom work Mrs. Milne found, particularly in the Spring Term, that she was ‘struggling with time… feeling behind’. There was a missed meeting and a general impression of low energy levels. However, the participant’s impending marriage was certainly an imperative at this time, in addition to acknowledged class commitments. She liked large chunks of time to address major projects. ‘If I don’t have a large amount of time things stack up…summer term there is a lot more time for reading and writing.’

In discussion with Mrs. Milne towards the end of the project she revealed an aim, an ambition that more specifically detailed her ‘love of learning’ and her passion for children’s cartoons, particularly in Russian. Mrs. Milne was partly Abkhazian, and was a fluent Abkhaz speaker. She wanted to write children’s books in Abkhaz, and to translate classic children’s stories into Abkhaz. Her research of children’s stories and the needs of children in Abkhazia was passionate, a significant feature of her substantial self. She was already a practitioner researcher, but she was also a researcher of culture for a language she did not teach.

Mr. Hornby Ch (1): AR focus - Peer Mentoring

Mr Hornby had been teaching for almost 14 years, having previously taught in two comprehensive schools. He had been head of Chemistry for five years at AR Grammar School. His interests were curriculum development, timetabling and was inspired by a love of Science, practical chemistry and science and society. He was actively involved in the Duke of Edinburgh’s award. He took his responsibility for his subject seriously and was an engaging, committed participant who was hungry for knowledge and loved his subject. However, he was unlikely to see himself as a teacher researcher. This was for very practical and understandable reasons.

My focus is elsewhere – timetabling – might help me get a job in SMT. It had (AR project) not been my priority at any point. It needs to be – bang, okay you are doing an Action Research project – that is why I’m
not interested in a masters – need time, money. I did a Ph.D – I blew it – bad experience – don’t want to get back into it – I have first class degree – if that can’t help me. I sometimes think it would be nice – PH.D in history of science. I like being taught and gaining new subject knowledge – I have been down to Cambridge for a week – Science in society. I enjoy Chemistry and Science and teaching it…work balance might see me move away classroom teaching. I want to live….longevity…enjoyment. At 55 it’s going to be hard work in the classroom. What would a Masters in Education do? I want something that intrinsically has science in it. I was a chemist before I was a teacher. If you don’t love your subject…if you don’t intrinsically love it…

Mr. Hornby, in common with the other participants, had a very clear idea about how he liked to work, and the manner in which he worked. He liked to work most closely with teachers within his own Chemistry department and other Science teachers, because they shared his love of subject. When asked about the organization of the AR project he said that he liked meeting ‘one to one’ as ‘I operate better on this basis’. He liked clarity and to work in a focused manner, with a dedicated period of time:

What would have helped me would have been regular timetabled sessions on a one to one basis, I need an hour when there is nothing else to do (a fortnightly regular meeting) Then you do not have extraneous factors – can’t work at home –demands of young family – head of department – 101 things to do. Focus is directly on things that affect you.

Time was an important issue. He said that the least satisfying aspect of the AR project was finding the time to sit down and think about the project. Mr. Hornby read widely, some was professionally based such as New Scientist, the ASE magazine, and Chemistry Review, and particularly enjoyed ‘contemporary fiction set in a modern society,’ as well as web based sources of information and newspapers. However, when asked what he had read for the AR project, he replied, ‘very little…it is just the time’.

Much of his time is focused upon his immediate imperatives: subject, department, and career development. He was ‘happy in post’ but if he were to see his career develop then it would be away from the classroom. He thought a move into a senior management team or assistant headship as a possible aim. Consequently, he valued the opportunities the school had given him to attend a four-day timetabling course and focus groups on curriculum development. He enjoyed working with the principal investigator, and working on a one to one basis on the AR project but development of specific management skills development were a priority, rather than the development of research skills.

In common with Dr. Austen, his project effectively ran from January to July, rather than September to December. His second child was born during the time of the project, and this along with adverse weather conditions, a project that involved coordination of students in lunchtime activities, from a range of classes he did not teach, and a culture of Action Research different to the positivist paradigm he was familiar delayed his engagement with the project.
What values are important to your subject? Objectivity. Rational analysis of problems and their solutions. What values are important to the school? Maximising student life chances by getting them the best possible grades!...People have different perspectives – like chalk and cheese – social scientists.

He found the most difficult aspects of the project to be: disseminating; writing, reading, collaborating with staff. He was comfortable with Chemists, where there was a common love of subject, and a common scientific culture, but he was less sure when dealing with those who might not share his perspective. Mr. Emile, and Dr. Austen, also had difficulties with collaboration, although their difficulties were not connected with a positivist culture, as will be explored later. Mr. Hornby’s pragmatic, positivist perspective did not prevent him from engaging with the AR project in a meaningful way. Indeed, during his dissemination to staff the discussion centered on the need for peer mentoring to be taken seriously by the school. There were competing demands on students in lunchtimes, and the school needed to priorities lunchtime activities. If peer mentoring were to succeed, it had to contribute to student development, and if this were the case – yet to be proved - there would have to be an organizational response that built peer mentoring formally into the school day.

**Dr. Austen Ch (2): AR focus - Reflective Logs**

Dr. Austen’s subject specialism was Chemistry, and he was deputy head at AR Grammar School. He had previously taught at an 11-18 Comprehensive school in rural Oxfordshire and a Headmaster’s Conference 11-18 independent school. He had held a postdoctoral research fellowship in Chemistry and was also involved in F.A. football coaching courses.

Dr. Austen had jointly instigated the project, had identified its participants, and had facilitated its development. The AR culture was new to him at first, but there were parallels in AR methodology in the way that Dr. Austen liked to work:

> Scattergun…little bit of thought, not much action initially…read…digested…played around…a bit of experimenting…see how that's gone…modify…Difficult to get to dept. meetings, rarely get there. My office is not in the dept. Opportunities are limited. Have you collaborated on this project? Outside of (AR project) meetings, no. Still at stage of…not got going, it is going, but not going. All this research is a different ball game to scientific research. Not what I’m used to. Does it go in peaks and troughs? You are a bit more tentative with it perhaps.

He worked independently on the project, sharing ideas with the principal investigator, but found management roles, other demands on his time, such as whole school issues, and the location of his office away from departmental colleagues hindered collaboration. There were similarities with Mr. Hornby in the ways that he worked on the project. Working independently he grappled
with the differences from between AR and the research culture he encountered in Chemistry. Once he had engaged with AR culture (in Dr. Austen’s case through wide reading in addition to working on a one to one basis with the principal investigator) his project developed through the spring and summer terms. He admitted that maintaining motivation, collaborating with students, and disseminating information were difficult aspects of the project. However, unlike Mr. Hornby, Action Research did coincide with Dr. Austen’s perception of his career development. He used the expression ‘There was instrumental reason for the development of Action Research’. He wanted to develop teaching and learning resources for students in order to raise attainment, and to develop network opportunities with other universities/schools/organizations for staff and pupils. The AR project would help him do that by allowing him to:

  - Widen my knowledge and experience which can be applied to the particular context of working in a selective grammar school;
  - Share our learning experiences with other schools as part of our Training School specialism.

Dr. Austen thought that Action Research provided an evidence base for effective teaching and learning, but that it also had a role, through student voice, of developing a deeper understanding of the school’s ethos and values. When asked how he might benefit professionally from the project he said he hoped that it would improve his ‘skill/ability as a research practitioner in schools’.

His draft for the report, along with Mr. Hornby’s was submitted later than the other participants. In terms of ‘academic writing’ (theoretical underpinning of concepts and ideas) the work was comparable only to Mr. Emile. His background reading was broad and he was the only participant to successfully access the university library electronically. His ‘leisure reading’ encompassed newspapers, chemistry and leadership and management journals, literature on scientific discoveries, and Victorian novels that reflect and explore the impact of change on society. There was a confluence of instrumental and intrinsic value.

**Mr Emile (Hi): AR focus - Critical Reading**

Mr. Emile, a History teacher, was in his second year of teaching. This was his first teaching appointment. His interests, apart from History, were Politics and Citizenship, the transferability of skills and knowledge within and across subject, and the question of whether the values of education were concerned with intrinsic worth, or were a means to an end.
In common with other participants, Mr. Emile preferred to work ‘on my own’, as,

I am not good with groups…I like people to go along with me, otherwise I go along with them but not necessarily contribute much. I’m quite theoretical…I would be doing a Ph.D. but I have a family and need to earn money – but that is what I would love to do. But I work okay in practice.

He was the first to complete his draft, and he also enrolled upon a complementary MA, using the work from the AR project for his assignment submissions. His project was practical and he hoped that others might take up the activity in their subjects. He recognized the importance of collaboration and dissemination with staff but said that implementation of this was difficult for him. He did perceive power issues (being in his second year of teaching) within his department as a potential challenge for dissemination, as well as the practical difficulties faced by cross department collaboration: time, competing issues such as departmental reviews, other cross school commitments such as a research and development group, and the limited opportunities to meet with specific participants from other departments (Mrs. Sachs) who share the same cultural perspective. He admitted that facing a group of teachers was more difficult for him than working with children, and he was keen to address this – indeed he did explore issues surrounding dissemination in one of his Masters assignments. In this quote there are echoes of Mrs. Gellatly and Mrs. Milne’s perspectives.

Collaboration is actively working to construct something, doesn’t happen much, except when it needs to. Sharing, is producing on your own and demonstrating. Sharing goes on, not collaboration

Despite his apprehension, his dissemination event for staff at AR Grammar School was well attended, interactive, thoughtful and well received.

Mr. Emile became involved in the AR project through financial inducement (subsidy of the masters), as well as the satisfaction of collaborating with students on teaching, learning. Mr. Emile was very enthusiastic about the idea of teacher research. This enthusiasm, he felt, was not shared by one member of his department:

(He’s) suspicious of time used, thinks recommendations are impractical, takes up his time…good set of notes to be revised from. Old fashioned. Do you think he’s right…not entirely wrong. KS4 it matters that they have good notes… People learn in different ways.

He worked in a department where there is a strong ethos of autonomy, where the ‘HoD trusts us to get results…how we get those results does not matter.’ He enjoyed this freedom, but with it comes difficulties for a young beginning teacher who wishes to share and explore with colleagues. Mr. Emile might be typical of Huberman’s (1989) ‘Survival and discovery'
stage/theme of secondary teacher development, characterized by enthusiasm, a desire for peer acceptance, discovery and the need to survive – survival amongst his peers, as well as among his students.

He saw his future working in education, and the idea of helping to influence the strategic direction of whole school policy and teaching and learning particularly appealed to him. He hoped at one stage that he would be able to pursue a Ph.D. in history, for ‘intellectual and personal pursuit.’ Intrinsic satisfaction derived from study was also linked to instrumental purpose as he wanted a masters qualification to sharpen his ‘understanding of modern educational and pedagogical developments’, whilst action research would ‘place me at the coal face of educational research’. He wanted experiences that:

would allow for active evaluation of my own strengths and weaknesses to promote my personal development, and also to test in the field whether this is the right career path for me.

Like Dr. Austen, there was a confluence of the intrinsic and the instrumental values of education.

**Mrs. Sachs: Psychology: AR focus - Student study time**

Mrs Sachs taught a range of social science subjects, including Psychology, Sociology & Citizenship and was also involved in the leadership and management of Politics, General Studies and Critical Thinking. She had undertaken a part-time PhD programme leading her to a strong interest in the development of learning processes. She was now particularly interested in how implicit learning can be fostered to increase the opportunity for insight and the transferability of skilful cognition across domains. She had taught for 12 years at AR Grammar and due to easing family commitments wanted to ‘demote’ to a classroom teacher from HoD, ‘perhaps with a view to HE work’. She wanted more opportunities to engage in research, with a particular interest in pedagogical development. She read widely, and had an interest in on-line medieval role play.

She was keen to develop personally and professionally. She wanted her department to share this interest, but from her perspective the department was more pragmatic and practical in terms of cooperation. She thought that a previous experience of a constructivist approach to pedagogy promoted by a colleague had developed a resistance to what was perceived to be an academic approach to teaching. Her colleagues did keep up to date, and did develop, although
Mrs Sachs thought that this development could at times be overly ‘specification driven.’ The department faced other barriers to collaboration:

our (department’s) best way of working is informally… one departmental meeting once a week but real issue come out in informal settings…work load is such we are making the most of our lunch times so we don’t have to take it home…work life balance… stress levels are going up… Now we are on one site which has brought us more together…but 3 part time members of staff … team nature of department – have lost sight of it – in part due to individual circumstances.

Intensification of work, intense pressure (‘mistakes are not an option’) and the competing demands of government, school and departmental initiatives, made focus upon the AR project difficult. This was only one factor holding back the development of an Action Research ethos. Split site working for the department, demanding personal circumstances – leading to a change of priorities for Mrs. Sachs - and part time members of staff were all powerful and practical obstacles to collaboration.

Mrs Sachs hoped that she could help to generate an interest in AR over time as a way of more formally evaluating what the department did, and encouraging closer collaboration. However, Mrs Sachs own preferred way of working – ‘messily…thinking is messy…I like thinking time and working on my own’ before seeking ‘that different perspective’ – raise questions about how we see collaboration. Mrs. Sachs found this one of the more difficult aspects of the project, along with dissemination. In common with other participants, collaboration with students was seen as one of the most satisfying aspects, whilst time constraints, work pressures (including a departmental review), departmental resistance, and illness made completion of the writing up of the project difficult.

Mrs. Sachs, like Mrs. Gellatly, Mrs. Milne and Mr. Emile understood the tensions in their work, and that these tensions were challenges, rather than obstacles.

**Summary discussion**

*Perceptions of what it means to be a teacher researcher.*

Postholm (2009), argued that teachers can become researchers through involvement in an AR project, but that this takes time and must have proven benefits to the teacher. From this research it appears a mistake to assume that AR is appropriate for all teachers. There are different roles to be fulfilled within a school, and teacher researcher is not necessarily intrinsic to these (Mr. Hornby and his interest in the SMT – Mr. Emile and his reference to a ‘good set of
notes to be revised from’). The participants (apart from Mr. Emile and his wistful thoughts of studying for a Ph.D, and Dr. Austen, who had a Ph.D) showed little evidence of new, wider reading specific to the Action Research project, and were happy to return their focus to teaching practicalities. However, all participants read widely. For example, Dr. Austen, liked to read nineteenth century novels that ‘examine the impact of change on society’; Mr. Hornby liked to read Murukami and Terry Pratchett; Mrs Sachs, medieval fantasy; Mrs. Milne children’s and Abkhaz literature, and this paper argues that this curiosity derived from their love of subject.

Gewirtz et. al. (2009), found that developing a culture of research amongst teachers requires the rethinking of assumptions about what it means to be a teacher. This paper argues that there also needs to be openness to different perspectives on what it means to be a researcher. Commitment to the practice of AR was found where there was a confluence of intrinsic and instrumental value in teaching and learning, as exemplified by Dr. Austen, Mr. Emile and Mrs Gellatly. When research was seen simply for its instrumental value, as with Mr. Hornby, it became more of a bolt on, and more problematic for the participant.

This paper argues that the curiosity derived from a love of subject, evident in these participants requires a rethinking of what it might mean to be a teacher researcher. AR should not be the defining methodology for the teacher researcher. These teachers share more than a love of school subject, but a love of curiosity leading to aspects of subject study that for some can find a place in their subject knowledge development, as with Mrs. Sachs and her interest in medieval fantasy and on-line role play, or Dr. Austen and his interest in nineteenth century literature that addresses the impact of science and technology on social change, and others that cannot easily find a place in within a high pressure curriculum geared to outstanding examination success, but It is not impossible, as Mrs. Milne and her cartoon viewing of Winnie the Pooh in Russian, and old Soviet era cartoons demonstrates.

*Uneven development*

In the spring term participants’ energy levels were clearly falling, and there were some issues of confidence regarding writing up. One initiative to address these was the instigation of joint writing sessions. Only one or two sessions were required to enable the participant to understand what was needed.
Day et al (2006) in an exploration of the complex, fragmented and multiple nature of secondary teacher identity argue that the values associated with a positive identity can be negatively affected by situation specific events. The substantial self (Nias 1989) requires protection, not simply from the demands and tensions inherent in departments (Mr. Emile), but also from life outside of the school (Mrs Sachs, Mr. Hornby, Mrs Milne - weddings, births, family in hospital, partners living overseas, covering for absent members of staff, and so on). Research needs time to think and, because of the demands of school and home, where there are other priorities, this can be difficult. This is not impossible, but personal and career aspirations are an important factor. Mrs. Sachs, for example, saw herself as a teacher researcher, and in discussion with her there was more than a passing resemblance to Huberman’s (1989) career category of serene disengagement.

Cultures

The positivistic, instrumental traditions of the two Chemistry participants, contrasted markedly with the intrinsic, exploratory characteristics of the two MFL participants. As would be expected, in this instance, the MFL participants embraced the philosophy of AR more readily. However, the pragmatic, practice based nature of AR, although initially creating barriers to participation, did not prevent the Chemistry participants from embracing the dynamics of the AR Cycle (Baumfield. et. al. 2008) once the possibilities for improvement to practice had become apparent, although at a slower pace than with the MFL, Psychology and History participants.

Balkanisation and Isolation (Hargreaves, 1994) are concepts familiar to students of school culture, and this characteristic appears to be a significant barrier to collaboration and dissemination, not only with regard to smaller departments and new entrants to the profession. Departments may work in isolation from other departments – Chemistry may not seek or see identification with Psychology for example - or teachers may, during a particular time, work more in isolation from each other, such as within the Social Science department, but it is not possible to generalize, except to say that sharing goes on, not collaboration, to borrow Mr. Emile's phrase.

Subject departments and their associated cultures are powerful agents influencing teacher development (Visscher and Witziers. 2004), but it is not possible to generalize from this research regarding the difference between, for example, science, humanities, or social science based subject departments. Subject (positivism), department (deliver results, notes) and school
cultures (accreditation, and or development?), career aims (SMT, Higher education), career stage, curiosity and love of learning are some of the factors identified as influencing the development of the teacher research model through this AR project.

Areas for further research

Perceptions of what it means to collaborate emerge from this work and it may be worth further research, particularly with regard to the role of collaboration in the development of teacher research. As teaching is heavily dependent upon individual teacher relationships with pupils and groups of pupils requiring a bespoke development of resources, teaching styles, classroom management techniques and teaching persona, reflection upon practice and sharing of resources and experiences of classroom initiatives may be an alternative model.

Different models of teacher researcher, the role of intrinsic and instrumental values, and their relevance to teacher and school development should to be further explored before considering how the teacher researcher can be supported within the school organization.

Given the stated dislike of dissemination, contrary to the observed practice of dissemination, working with adults could be another fruitful area of research.

References


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