2

Teacher Action Research

Collaborative, Participatory, and Democratic Inquiry

The literature on action research is immense and deep. In this chapter, I draw from that literature to discuss the early history, origins, theory, and development of action research. The integration of action research into school settings and the benefits of action research for teachers are delineated. The influence of postmodernism and feminism on the nature and character of action research is reviewed. Different approaches to action research are described. I hope that as you read this chapter you will develop a fundamental grasp of the historical, theoretical, and epistemological underpinnings of action research as well as an appreciation for action research as intellectual practice and a way of thinking.

❖ WHAT IS TEACHER ACTION RESEARCH?

Action research is a paradigm and not a method. As a paradigm, action research is a conceptual, social, philosophical, and cultural framework for doing research, which embraces a wide variety of research methodologies

and forms of inquiry. Unlike positivism, with its emphasis on prediction, control, and generalization through quantitative methodologies, action research is a paradigm that reflects the principle that reality is constructed through individual or collective conceptualizations and definitions of a particular situation requiring a wide spectrum of research methodologies. Characteristically, action research studies a problematic situation in an ongoing systematic and recursive way to take action to change that situation.

Action research is a process of concurrently inquiring about problems and taking action to solve them. It is a sustained, intentional, recursive, and dynamic process of inquiry in which the teacher takes an action—purposefully and ethically in a specific classroom context—to improve teaching/learning. Action research is change research, a nonlinear, recursive, cyclical process of study designed to achieve concrete change in a specific situation, context, or work setting to improve teaching/learning. It seeks to improve practice, the understanding of practice by its practitioners, and the situations in which practice is located (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 165). Although it is focused on actions leading to change, action research is also a mental disposition—a way of being in the classroom and the school—a lifelong habit of inquiry. It is recursive in that teacher-researchers frequently work simultaneously within several research steps and circle back to readdress issues and modify research questions based on reflection for, reflection in, and reflection on action. The reflection-action-reflection-action process can be considered a spiraling cyclical process in which research issues change and actions are improved or discarded or become more focused. In education, action research generates actionable hypotheses about teaching, learning, and curriculum from reflection on and study of teaching, learning, and curriculum to improve teaching, learning, and curriculum.

Action research assumes that teachers are the agents and source of educational reform and not the objects of reform. Action research empowers teachers to own professional knowledge because teachers—through the process of action inquiry—conceptualize and create knowledge, interact around knowledge, transform knowledge, and apply knowledge. Action research enables teachers to reflect on their practice to improve it, become more autonomous in professional judgment, develop a more energetic and dynamic environment for teaching and learning, articulate and build their craft knowledge, and recognize and appreciate their own expertise. It assumes practice is embedded in the science of the unique, recognizing that human events are idiosyncratic; they vary with time, place, cultural circumstances, the ecology of the moment, serendipity, obliquities, and unforeseen circumstances.

Action research assumes caring knowledge is contextual knowledge, with the understanding that human actions always take place in context and must be understood in context. It assumes knowledge is tentative and probabilistic, continually subject to modification. It views "not knowing" and ambiguity as resources for learning. Action research assumes teacher development involves lifelong learning in changing and multidimensional contexts. Action research is grounded in the reality of the school, classroom, teachers, and students. It is a process in which study and inquiry lead to actions that make a difference in teaching and learning, that bridge doing (practice), learning (study), and reflection (inquiry). Action research reflects deliberate attention to the ways that what we know is caught up in what we do and who we are. Through action research, we intellectually and affectively nurture ourselves, our classrooms, and our students. Classrooms and schools become sites where new meanings and understanding are created and shared.

Action research challenges certain assumptions about the research process and educational change (Grundy, 1994, pp. 28–29). It challenges the separation of research from action, the separation of the researcher from the researched, assumptions about control of knowledge, and assumptions about the nature of educational reform. Action research is *by, with, of*, and *for* people, rather than *on* people (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 2).

In educational action research, teachers, who traditionally have been the subjects of research, conduct research on their own situations and circumstances in their classrooms and schools. They conduct their research according to Lewin's basic dictum, "No research without action—no action without research" (as cited in Marrow, 1977, p. 10). Teachers are privileged through the action research process to produce knowledge and consequently experience that "knowledge is power." As knowledge and action are joined in changing practice, there is growing recognition of the power of teachers to change and reform education from the inside rather than having change and reform imposed top down from the outside. Through action research, "teachers transcend the truth of power through the power of truth" (Whitehead, 1989).

❖ ACTION RESEARCH: CHANGING PRACTICE

During the 1970s and early 1980s, the writing process movement contributed to the vitalization of action research in schools throughout the country. The major focus of these action research studies, which

involved collaboration between university and teacher-researchers, was on the teaching of writing. These projects were initiated through the work of the Bay Area Writing Project, which later emerged as the National Writing Project, the Philadelphia Writing Project, and the Breadloaf School of English; it also found expression in the naturalistic and contextualized studies of writing by such people as Nancy Atwell, Lucy Calkins, Janet Emig, and Donald Graves.

In recent years, action research has been employed to study a variety of classroom and schoolwide issues (see Table 2.1). Based on an analysis of 73 published reports of action research studies conducted by classroom teachers, Kochendorfer (1997) identified seven types of classroom action research studies and the kinds of questions they addressed:

1. Changes in classroom practice (e.g., What effect will daily writing have on my students?)
2. Effects of program restructuring (e.g., How will a Foxfire approach affect student work habits?)
3. New understandings of students (e.g., What happens when at-risk students perceive they can be successful?)
4. Understanding of self as teacher (e.g., What skills do I need to refine to be more effective in teaching students to work together?)
5. New professional relationships with colleagues and students (e.g., How can regular and special education teachers effectively co-teach?)
6. Teaching a new process to the students (e.g., How can I teach third graders to use reflection?)
7. Seeking a quantifiable answer (e.g., To what extent are portfolios an appropriate assessment tool for kindergartners?)

❖ ACTION RESEARCH: TEACHERS' VOICES

All of these studies suggest that action research has been and continues to be a process of practical and grounded inquiry that reflects in its origins the empowerment of teachers to identify and solve their own problems. A good example is found in the remarks of Sharon Jeffrey (1996), who writes about the impact action research has had on her as a classroom teacher:

Table 2.1 Topics of Action Research Studies

- At-risk students (Leonard, 1997)
- Becoming a teacher (Phillips & Carr, 2006)
- Block scheduling (Marshak, 1997)
- Bully prevention (Bailey & Rios, 2005)
- Conflict management in schools (Kenway, 1997)
- Classroom behavior management (Daniels, 1998)
- Creating equitable classrooms (Caro-Bruce, Flessner, Klehr, & Zeichner, 2007)
- Development of basic literacy skills among urban minority students (Wilson, 2007)
- Inclusive education (Armstrong & Moore, 2004; Oyler, 2006)
- Online learning (McPherson & Nunes, 2004)
- Parental involvement (Brough & Irvin, 2001; Reynolds-Johnson, 1997)
- Professional development of teachers (Goodwin, 1999; Marion, 1998; Senese, 2002; Zeichner, 2003)
- Role of instructional coordinator (Clay, 1998)
- Science and mathematics teaching (Goldstone & Shroyer, 2000; Capobianco & Feldman, 2006)
- School improvement (Durrant & Holden, 2006; Gross, 2002; Halsall, 1998; Hendricks, 2006; MacDonald, 1997; Raymond, 2001; Rudduck & Flutter, 2004)
- School's mentoring program (Sharp, 1996)
- Silent reading among middle-grade students (Gibbons, 1997)
- Staff collaboration in the school restructuring process (Suarez, 1997)
- Social justice (Lynn & Smith-Maddox, 2007)
- Special education (Boardman, Arguelles, Vaughn, Hughes, & Klinger, 2005)
- Teachers' beliefs (Moore, 1996; Prejean, 1996)
- Teaching geography (Bednarz, 2002)

> Action research transformed my relationship with students because I could no longer conceive of researching without seeking their insights, reflections, and questions about teaching and learning. In the process, my students became more reflective and aware of their own learning. . . . Action research became the most transformative experience of my teaching career. Suddenly, my classroom was fascinating and exciting in ways I had never considered. I always enjoyed students, but after ten years of teaching, the anti-intellectual routine and stifling structures of the school system

> took their toll. I seriously explored other careers. . . . Action research integrated with my teaching and formed the core of my new career. Each year now, I systematically pursue research and gain a deeper understanding of teaching and learning, and the implications for student learning, teacher education, and school reform. (p. 96)

Sandy Crepps (1999), a fifth-grade teacher in the Anderson Elementary School in Dixon, New Mexico, describes teacher research as a kaleidoscope:

> I can never resist picking up a kaleidoscope and being surprised and delighted by mirrored patterns. Teacher research is like that to me. It focuses me on my classroom and by sharing my experiences with other teachers I am able to see new images of not only what I am doing, but what I could be doing. These images come from other teachers' perspectives and also as I hear myself explaining or when I am writing about what I am doing. I begin to see patterns that I didn't realize existed. These new perspectives open up new possibilities and new insights, allowing me to see my students, my teaching, the curriculum, differently than I had before. . . . That is why I do teacher research. The journaling, the networking with other teacher researchers, and the questions I pose all lead me to reflect on my teaching: the good, the bad, and the complexities of life in a classroom of thirty-two students. (p. 10)

Jennifer Moore (2002), a teacher at Coronado High School, Coronado, California, tells how her teacher research taught her to listen:

> One of the most exciting aspects of teacher research is that it helped me focus on the vital questions related to my instructional practices. Through the intense introspection involved in teacher research, I had, in effect, invited myself to be videotaped running students off the road. While my initial goal in allowing for that close examination of my practice may have been to critique student stride or speed, I wound up recognizing how my own actions and pedagogical methods affected their results and feelings about the run itself. Writing about the experience has deepened my understanding of my role in my students' learning and how to apply what I have learned to this year's team of "runners." A teacher researcher is a listener—someone actively engaged in making new discoveries about her students, her teaching and herself. In my first

> year of this process, I learned that listening is, indeed, the most important part. (p. 10)

And Maria Mercado, a bilingual teacher with the Albuquerque Public Schools, in discussing the effects of teacher research on her classroom, says:

> Teacher research enhanced my classroom teaching, strengthened my oral and written articulation of what was occurring in the classroom, and in this way improved my practice. The daily journal writing along with my conversations about teaching and learning processes in the classroom served to transform my teaching on a daily basis. What has become evident to me in the examination of this process is my growth as a researcher, a student of bilingual education, and a classroom teacher. (quoted in Fischer et al., 2000, p. 9)

The voices of these teachers document the transformative power of action research in changing teaching approaches, in developing deeper understanding of their students and of who they are as teachers, in enhancing their confidence and self-esteem, in gaining new perspectives, and in revitalizing their careers. Finally, they affirm that teacher action research is a valid and energizing process for constructing knowledge about teaching and learning and for empowering teachers to take leadership in bringing about educational change.

❖ ACTION RESEARCH: OUTCOMES FOR TEACHERS

Practicing the strategies and skills of teacher action research can help aspiring teachers in designing their own meaningful pedagogy, shift the identity of teacher as expert to one of inquirer, and make it more difficult to take the dynamics of the classroom for granted (Britzman, 2003, p. 239). For example, a study of beginning teachers, with 1 to 5 years of experience (Campbell, 2004), documented that teachers who learned to do teacher research as part of their preservice program carried their learning about teacher research into their own classrooms, using data collection procedures to construct knowledge about teaching, specifically in five categories of knowledge: knowledge of classroom structure, knowledge of self, knowledge of students, knowledge of curriculum and instruction, and knowledge of theory.

Mohr (1985, pp. 127–128) found that teachers who engaged in teacher research wrote more honestly about classroom problems, became more self-assured, began to see teaching more as a learning

process, found their research plans became their lesson plans in response to discoveries they were making in their classrooms, and changed their focus from teaching to finding out what their students knew and then helping their students to learn.

In addition, teachers were able and encouraged to try new ways of teaching as they became sensitive to classroom variables and examined the classroom context simultaneously with their teaching, moved from evaluating issues and events to documenting issues and events, asked more questions and listened more to their students and colleagues, and grew more tolerant of creative chaos in their thinking, which led them to become more understanding of creative chaos in their students' thinking and writing.

In a study of the CRESS Teacher Research Program, Brookmyer (2007, pp. 123–133) found that among a sample of 114 teachers who had conducted action research studies from 1985 to 2005,

- 89% indicated that teacher research is an important information base for reflective practice
- 85% indicated that teacher research is an important foundation on which to develop greater professionalism
- 84% responded that teacher research provides valuable knowledge for classroom practice
- 75% believed that teacher research provides a context for the transformation of practice.

And finally, Onwuegbuzie and Dickinson (2006), after conducting an extensive review of the literature on action research, identified 27 positive outcomes associated with the conduct of action research (see Table 2.2).

What, then, is it that makes action research a productive venue for classroom teachers? What is the nature and character of action research, and how did it all start? What makes action research different from other forms of research? To address these questions, one has to understand the history of action research and how it evolved into a unique way for constructing knowledge to inform action.

❖ THE ORIGINS OF ACTION RESEARCH

Action Research and Social Justice

Action research is rooted in a concern for social justice, which was and is the foundation for action research. Action research's participatory

Table 2.2 Advantages of Action Research for Teachers

- Develops an increased awareness of the discrepancies between goals and practices
- Improves teachers' ability to be analytical about their practices
- Increases receptiveness to educational change
- Improves instructional effectiveness
- Improves decision-making skills/awareness
- Helps teachers view teaching as a type of inquiry or experimentation
- Increases reflection about teaching
- Increases understanding about the dynamics of a classroom
- Heightens the curiosity of teachers
- Empowers teachers by giving them greater confidence in their ability to promote change
- Can expand career opportunities and roles for teachers
- Can revitalize teaching and reduce burnout
- Increases appreciation for theory, provides an avenue for informing theory, and demystifies research
- Encourages positive change and enables teachers to become agents of change
- Identifies or verifies which methods work
- Increases awareness, evaluation, and accountability of decisions made
- Promotes ownership of effective practices
- Promotes the selection of research questions that are personally meaningful
- Encourages teacher-researchers to be active learners
- Increases willingness to accept research findings for use in teaching
- Encourages more critical and responsive consumers of research
- Increases teachers' knowledge about situations and contexts
- Facilitates defense of pedagogic actions
- Strengthens connection between pure and applied research
- Increases commitment to goals they have formulated themselves rather than those imposed on them
- Increases opportunity to gain knowledge and skill in research methodology and applications
- Makes distinction between researcher and teacher irrelevant

SOURCE: Onwuegbuzie and Dickinson (2006).

action-oriented form of inquiry originated outside the field of education in the work of John Collier, social worker, anthropologist, and author. After holding several positions in community organizations, serving as the executive secretary of the American Indian Defense Association, and editing the magazine, *American Indian Life*, Collier was appointed in 1933 by Franklin D. Roosevelt as the U.S. Commissioner for Indian Affairs, a position he held for 12 years, making him the longest-serving person in this position. Reversing federal Indian policies, his "Indian New Deal" approach officially rescinded the repression of American Indian language and promoted tribal self-government, cultural preservation, and religious freedom for Native Americans. Specifically, Collier promoted the passage of the Indian Reorganization Act, which encouraged tribes to develop their own constitutions and establish themselves as membership corporations to conduct tribal business. He founded the Emergency Conservation Work program, which employed 22,000 Indians in "the building of secondary roads, trails, telephone lines, fire lookouts, nursery work, and seed collection," which led to the development of "Indian-built, Indian-maintained, and Indian-used projects" around soil conservation, forestry, and the general recovery and regeneration of Indian lands (Collier, 1963, p. 187).

Collier was appalled by the egregious record of the U.S. government's inhumane treatment of the American Indian, and he developed a collaborative action research approach designed to reverse deeply discriminatory, racist, and destructive practices and to restore the integrity and dignity of Indian society and culture. In his efforts to establish a living democracy in Indian societies and to implement more democratic policies and approaches in the Bureau of Indian Affairs, he saw action research as an imperative:

> We had in mind a particular kind of research, or, if you will, particular conditions. We had in mind research impelled from central areas of needed action. And since action is by nature not only specialized but also integrative of specialties, and nearly always integrative of more than specialties, our needed research must be of the integrative sort. Again, since the findings of the research must be carried into effect by the administrators and layman, and must be criticized by them through their experience, the administrator and the layman must themselves participate creatively in the research, impelled as it is from their own area of need . . . such research has invariably operated to deepen our realization of the potentialities of the democratic way, as well as our realization of our own extreme, pathetic shortcomings. (Collier, 1945, pp. 275–276)

After completing his 12 years of service as Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Collier (1945) published an article describing the Bureau of Indian Affairs as a laboratory of ethnic relations and outlined his participatory research methodology, which he called action-serving research. He concluded his article by citing the distinctive strengths of action research:

> We have learned that the action-evoked, action serving, integrative and layman participating way of research is incomparably more productive of social results than the specialized and isolated way; we think we have proved that it makes discovery more central, more universal, more functional, and more true for the nascent social sciences. (pp. 300–301)

The participative collaborative model of inquiry championed by Collier was a congenial match with the work of the social psychologist Kurt Lewin, who studied the dynamics of group interaction seeking to counteract racism and to improve intergroup relations. Lewin (1946) was familiar with Collier's work in action research, referring to it approvingly in an article he wrote on action research and minority problems. Both Collier and Lewin shared deep interest in and commitment to democracy as a way of life and the conviction that action research could strengthen democratic relationships. During the 1930s and 1940s, Lewin and his colleagues developed the concept of action research as a way to study and improve group and intergroup relations and to address conflict, crises, and change. They viewed action research as a collaborative process in which participants sharing power in conducting studies of their own situations and circumstances could work together to understand and solve social and organizational problems.

Lewin was invited to establish a Research Center for Group Dynamics at MIT in 1944, where he and his staff launched action research projects to combat racial discrimination and to improve intergroup relationships (Lewin, 1945). These studies focused on such issues as anti-Semitic gang behavior, resistance to hiring black sales personnel, the effects of integrated versus segregated public housing, the socialization of street gangs, the cause and cure of prejudice in children, and ways of dealing with public remarks made by bigots.

> Lewin was particularly concerned to raise the self-esteem of minority groups, to help them seek "independence, equality, and cooperation" through action research and other means. He wanted

> minority groups to overcome the forces of "exploitation" and colonization that had been prominent in their modern histories. (Adelman, 1993, pp. 7–8)

Lewin (1946) introduced and coined the term *action research* in his article on action research and minority problems; he described action research as "a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action and research leading to social action" using a process of "a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact finding about the result of the action." The spiral of steps or cycles consisted of a basic cycle of activities: identifying a general idea, engaging in reconnaissance, making a general plan, developing the first action step, implementing the first action step, evaluating, and revising the general plan. From this basic cycle, the researchers then spiral into a second cycle of activities: developing the second action step, implementing, evaluating, revising the general plan, developing the third action step, implementing, evaluating, and so on continuing into a third, fourth, fifth cycle of activities. Lewin's work affirmed the idea that a practitioner's reflection on knowing and reflection in action can lead to actionable theory that can be generalized to other situations.

Educational Action Research

Building on the work of Collier and Lewin, the great promise inherent in practical inquiry involving the collaboration and mutual support of university professors and classroom teachers soon came to fruition. Collaborative action research was initiated, pioneered, and demonstrated in the 1940s and 1950s by Stephen Corey and others at Teachers College, Columbia University, in cooperative action research projects that brought together teachers and professors primarily to improve curriculum, supervision, and instruction. Working in the Horace Mann Institute of School Experimentation, Corey (1953) advocated and advanced action research as an alternative to traditional research in schools, based on the belief that "research methodology will not begin to have the influence it might have on American education until thousands of teachers, administrators, and supervisors make more frequent use of the method of science in solving their own practical problems" (p. 18). In *Action Research to Improve Schools,* he set forth his ideas on action research, how it differed from traditional research approaches, and how it could be implemented within complex contextual school environments, primarily through collaborative inquiry involving teachers,

administrators, parents, and university faculty. Recognizing teachers' reluctance to implement someone else's ideas in their classrooms, Corey vigorously argued that teachers should be equal partners in "cooperative action research" and play a major role in the design of classroom research and in the collection and interpretation of data.

Corey (1953, pp. 40–41) viewed action research as a recursive process proceeding through spiraling cycles of planning, actions, reflections, and change reflected in five stages:

- Identifying a problem area about which an individual or a group would be sufficiently concerned to want to take action
- Selecting a specific problem, formulating a hypothesis, and specifying a goal and a procedure for reaching it
- Carefully recording the actions taken and gathering and analyzing data to determine the degree to which the goal has been achieved
- Inferring, from the evidence collected, generalizations regarding the relationship between the actions and the desired goal
- Continually retesting these generalizations in action situations

Within these stages, problems, hypotheses, questions, and actions could be changed, reflecting the recursive nature of the research, with each cycle of research affecting previous and subsequent cycles. Like Lewin's conception of spiraling cycles, the stages are not linear but rather are considered as interacting loops of research activities.

In his book *The School as a Center of Inquiry*, Schaefer (1967) extended the concept of action research to make it an integral part of the school culture, suggesting that teachers use action research to make schools collegial centers of inquiry rather than distribution centers for information developed outside the schools. He argued:

> We can no longer afford to conceive of the schools simply as distribution centers for dispensing cultural orientation, information, and knowledge developed by other units. The complexities of teaching and learning in formal classrooms have become so formidable and the intellectual demands upon the system so enormous that the school must be much more than a place of instruction. It must be a center of inquiry—a producer as well as a transmitter of knowledge. (p. 1)

Schaefer urged that students as well as teachers become involved in academic inquiry and that experimentation with teaching and learning

become the school norm. Through inquiry, collaborating teachers would design new instructional approaches and curriculum materials and try them out to see what worked and what didn't work. Their work would then inform further inquiry and trials, and their schools would become "knowledge creating schools" in which the intellectual assets of teachers would be deeply valued and supported (Hargreaves, 2001).

Embedded in action research, as conceived by Collier, Lewin, Corey, and Schaefer, is Dewey's idea of inquiry—thought intertwined with action, reflection in and on action—which proceeds from doubt to the resolution of doubt to the generation of new doubt. For Dewey, doubt lies not in the mind but in the situation. Inquiry begins with situations that are problematic; that are confusing, uncertain, and conflicted; and that block the free flow of action. Schon (1995) elaborates Dewey's concept of inquiry:

> The inquirer is in, and in transaction with, the problematic situation. He or she must construct the meaning and frame the problem of the situation, thereby setting the stage for problem solving, which in combination with changes in the external context, brings a new problematic situation into being. Hence, the proper test of a round of inquiry is not only "Have I solved this problem?" but "Do I like the new problems I've created?" (p. 31)

Hence, he introduces the notion of action research as a habit of continuing inquiry—a Deweyan attitude of questioning one's practice that teacher-researcher Carol Battaglia (1995) embraces:

> I now believe that action research is as much a process of asking questions about one's practice as it is deciding what to do about solutions. Action research enables you to live your questions; in a way they become the focal point of your thinking. My questions took on an almost mantra-like quality; they seemed to seep into my thinking and conversation, creep into my reading and writing when I'd least expect it. They also kept me focused. I appreciate how professionally healthy it might be to adopt an "action research mentality" whereby one is always thinking about or attempting to polish another facet of the work one does. Perhaps then action research is an attitude or becomes an attitude that is brought to one's practice. (p. 107)

The Growth and Development of Action Research

In the late 1950s and during the 1960s, action research went into somewhat of a decline, partly because of its association with radical

positive activism (Stringer, 2007, p. 10), but mostly because it was not viewed as genuine research. Critics of action research, representing behavioristic and positivistic views, argued that action research was not real research because it did not use quantitative methods in controlled experiments to generate generalizations, was statistically unsophisticated, was conducted by teachers who were amateur researchers not well prepared in their teacher education programs to conduct rigorous research, and was just a form of commonsense problem solving (Hodgkinson, 1957). In other words, action research was viewed as too much of a departure from experimental science and therefore less rigorous. Furthermore, critics argued that action research couldn't be conducted by classroom teachers, who were inundated with too many tasks and had little time or preparation for doing real research. These critiques came under fire with the emergence of postmodernism, feminism, and a vast literature that raised fundamental questions about social science paradigms and the basic epistemology and methodologies of positivism on which the critiques of action research rested. Perhaps the most scathing attack on the social sciences can be found in the words of Sanford (1970), who, in addressing the question Whatever happened to action research? wrote:

> Like other industries, social science has been polluting its environment. Not only has it been spoiling its research subjects by treating them as means rather than ends; not only has it been disseminating a monstrous image of researchable man; it has been creating a large amount of waste in the form of useless information. (p. 18)

Since the early 1970s, there has been a significant and dramatic surge in the practice of action research in a variety of venues all over the world. Several factors fueled the growing momentum of recognition, legitimization, and practice of action research (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, pp. 166–167): the professionalization of teaching, reflecting the idea of teachers investigating their own practice; the perceived irrelevance of much contemporary educational research for practice; the revival of interest in the "practical" in the curriculum (Schwab, 1969); the emergence of "new wave methods" in educational research with their acknowledgement of participants' knowledge, perspectives, and categories in shaping educational practices and situations; the adoption of a self-monitoring role in teaching to address issues of accountability by highlighting good practice and sensitively critiquing working conditions; the organization of teacher support networks committed to the continuing development of education; and the increased recognition

that action research provides an understandable and workable approach to the improvement of practice through critical self-reflection.

Postmodernism and Action Research

To this list of reasons, I would add that **postmodernism** (Brown & Jones, 2001) has been a pivotal influence in advancing the legitimation and widespread practice of action research throughout the world. The foundational principles of contemporary action research reflect the generative ideas of postmodernism (Tarnas, 1991, pp. 395–410):

- Reality and knowledge are plastic and subject to constant change.
- Reality is a fluid, unfolding process, constructed in the mind.
- Reality is at once multiple, local, and temporal without demonstrable foundation.
- Concrete experience takes priority over fixed abstract principles.
- No single a priori thought system should govern belief or investigation.
- Meaning systems coexist and interpenetrate.
- Imagination plays a mediating role in human experience, and philosophical and scientific statements are inherently metaphorical.
- Human knowledge is subjectively determined by a multitude of factors, and all truths and assumptions must be continually subjected to direct testing.
- Knowledge is created through open discourse.
- The search for knowledge is endlessly self-revising, and respect for contingency and discontinuity limits knowledge to the local and the specific.

Feminist Scholarship, Critique, and Action Research

Within postmodern thought, perhaps the most powerful intellectual influence, and one that has affected the conceptual evolution of action research, is **feminism**. Tarnas (1991) makes a strong case for this assertion:

> Considered as a whole, the feminist perspective and impulse has brought forth perhaps the most vigorous, subtle, and radically critical analysis of conventional intellectual and cultural assumptions in all of contemporary scholarship. No academic discipline or human experience has been left untouched by the feminist reexamination of

> how meanings are created and preserved, how evidence is selectively interpreted and theory molded with mutually reinforcing circularity, how particular rhetorical struggles and behavioral styles have sustained male hegemony, how women's voices remained unheard through centuries of social and intellectual male dominance, how deeply problematic consequences have ensued from masculine assumptions about reality, knowledge, nature, society, the divine. Such analyses in turn have helped illuminate parallel patterns and structures of domination that have marked the experience of other oppressed peoples and forms of life . . . long established categories that had sustained traditional oppositions and dualities—between male and female, body and spirit, self and other—have been deconstructed and reconceived, permitting the contemporary mind to consider less dichotomized alternative perspectives. (p. 408)

Feminist scholarship and critique continue to inform and affect the development of action research (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Britzman, 2003; Grumet, 1988; Hicks, 1999; Hollingsworth & Cody, 1994; Kohli, 2000; Lather, 1991; Lykes, 1997; Maguire, 1987, 2001, 2002; McIntyre, 2007; Miller, Maguire, & McIntyre, 2004; Naples, 2003; Skelton & Francis, 2005). They focus attention on the relationship between the knower and the known; power relationships in the construction of knowledge; understanding of subjugated knowledge; the connections between feelings and knowledge—emotion and inquiry; the connection between gender and ways of knowing; and indigenous people's epistemology. The fundamental operating principles for these scholars are that human knowledge is created in relationship, that everyday experience is gendered, and that the everyday is experienced through multiple identities and the web of oppression.

Maguire makes the case that

> it remains impossible for action research to be a transformative approach to knowledge creation until action researchers learn more about feminism with all its diversity, critically examine their own multiple identities and implications for their work, and open up to feminist voices and visions. (Bryden-Miller, Maguire, & McIntyre, 2004, p. 132)

Maguire (2001) elaborates five current emergent themes that demonstrate how feminists inform the work of action research—gender, multiple identities and interlocking oppressions, voice and silence, everyday experiences, and power. Within the theme of gender, it is recognized that

gender is a central category of human experience and is the structure in which all individual lives are framed. Action researchers need to examine how their gendered identities affect their personal and professional lives. The theme of multiple identities and interlocking oppressions captures the sensitivity to the ways in which gender oppression is experienced within other oppressions, such as those based on race and class, and suggest that those who conduct action research need to raise their consciousness about the ways in which gender, race, and class are interconnected and to become more attentive to systems of domination that oppress marginalized groups. Voice and silence are themes that need to be explored in the action research process, for far too many people have been silenced because of their gender, race, class, or power status. A primary goal of action research is to break these silences and free up the voices of people who have been marginalized or who feel powerless.

Maguire argues that researchers must recognize that everyday experience is a source of legitimate knowledge and a place to begin inquiry and the construction of knowledge. To have meaning, these everyday experiences should be examined within context and connected with the social and institutional structures that affect our lives. The final theme of power is reflected in the challenges that action research makes to the power structure of knowledge construction. Who constructs knowledge? Which knowledge is considered privileged?

There are other themes, like Maguire's, that suggest feminist research is foundational to current action research practices: not viewing the researcher/researched relationship as a hierarchical relationship; seeing emotions as valuable aspects of the research process; abandoning conceptualizations of "objectivity" and "subjectivity" as binaries or dichotomies; taking into account the researchers' intellectual autobiography in considering their conclusions; recognizing the existence and management of the different "realities" or versions held by the researchers and the researched; acknowledging the issues surrounding authority and power in research; and finally recognizing that there is authority and power in the written representation of research (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p. 189).

Power relationships, transparency in the research process, and plurality of viewpoints are key issues for feminist researchers, as noted by Kirsch (1999):

> Feminist grounded action research opens knowledge creation conditions to scrutiny, attempts to unsettle and equalize power relations between researchers and participants, facilitates conditions for empowerment and reciprocity, wrestles with dilemmas

> of representation and interpretation, and experiments with polyvocal research accounts. (quoted in Maguire, 2001, p. 66)

Extrapolating from the stance of feminist research on power relationships, one can say that educational action research empowers teachers and participants in the research process to "unsettle" and balance the power relationships between the researchers in the "academy" and K–12 classroom teachers. As a process of empowerment, action research takes many forms and shapes.

❖ APPROACHES TO ACTION RESEARCH

Carson and Sumara (1997, p. xxi) offer three criteria for determining how any particular form of inquiry would be identified as action research. When any form of inquiry meets all three criteria, it can be considered a form of action research. The three criteria include any form of inquiry that seeks to learn about the complexly formed, ecologically organized relations of lived experience; is specifically organized around questions of learning, understanding, and/or interpretation; and self-consciously attempts to alter perception and action, that is, it is transformational in nature.

Using these criteria, a number of different approaches to action research can be identified. It should be borne in mind, however, that although each of these approaches has some distinct features, in my judgment, they all share common action research elements: the recursive, spiraling nature of the research; the emphasis on collaboration and critical dialogue; the empowerment of practitioners in generating knowledge, self-reflection, and reflection for-in-on practice. They also share common values and commitments, including

> a rejection of a means-end conception of rationality and of a technical-rationalist view of human worth; a commitment to personal autonomy and its rational components of honesty and sincerity; emancipatory concerns; liberal and democratic politics; an idea of genuine knowledge as essentially purposeful rather than inert; a transcendental justification. (Parker, 1997, p. 32)

The differences, then, seem to be more in degree of emphasis rather than in the fundamental nature and character of the particular action research approach. Reason and colleagues (Reason & McArdle, 2004, p. 1; Reason & Torbert, 2001, pp. 11–17) differentiate action research by considering three strategies of inquiry that are highly interdependent:

1. **First-person research**/practices address the ability of individual researchers to foster an inquiring approach, to act awarely and choicefully, and to assess effects in the outside world while acting. First-person inquiry skills are essential for those who would provide leadership in any social enterprise. (Reason & McArdle, 2004, p. 1).

In first-person research, the teacher-researcher attends to such questions as: Who am I? What is important and meaningful to me? What values, ideologies, worldviews, assumptions, and perspectives do I bring to the process of inquiry? First-person methodologies include autobiographical writing, journal writing, narratives, and reflection on audio- and videotapes of one's behavior.

2. **Second-person research**/practices such as cooperative inquiry address our ability to inquire face-to-face with others into issues of mutual concern, usually in small groups. In cooperative inquiry, a small group of peers work together in cycles of action and reflection to develop both understanding and practice in a matter of mutual concern (Reason & McArdle, 2004, p. 1). In a typical cooperative inquiry group, six to twenty people work together as co-researchers and co-subjects (Reason & Torbert, 2001, p. 11).
3. **Third-person research** and practice includes a range of practices which draw together the views of large groups of people and create a wider community of inquiry involving persons who cannot always be known to each other face-to-face. Under this heading we include, for example, practices which "network" small inquiry groups, the range of large-scale dialogue and "whole system" conference designs, and the "learning history" approach (Reason & McArdle, 2004, p. 1).

Third-person research/practice attempts to create conditions that awaken and support the inquiring qualities of first- and second-person research/practice in a wider community, thus empowering participants to create their own knowing-in-action in collaboration with others.

In their documentation and analysis of first, second, and third person-centered research activities that occurred over time in a consulting intervention with 10 different organizations, Chandler and Torbert (2003) constructed a $3 \times 3 \times 3$ model of a new vision of action research. Using three dimensions of time (past, present, future), three dimensions of

research practices (first person, second person, and third person), and three research voices (first-person research on first-person practice, second-person research on second-person practice, and third-person research on third-person practice), they generated 27 flavors of action research. They suggest that the 27 flavors of action research model can be used

> as a heuristic for engaging with a wider universe of potential action research interventions as well as for designing particular actual interventions to increase joint inquiry in the present, to increase mutuality and joint ownership over time, and to increase eventually measurable transformational impact. (Chandler & Torbert, 2003)

For our purposes in exploring and understanding the process of action research as it affects teaching and learning and educational change, I have identified four major approaches that reflect first-person, second-person, and third-person research/practices. These approaches are not mutually exclusive of each other—there is a great deal of overlap between and among them—and yet their histories, purposes, and approaches differ sufficiently to mark them with their own identities.

Collaborative Action Research

Action research becomes collaborative when it is done in partnership with colleagues, or with students, or with university faculty, or with parents, or a combination of partners. It engages both first- and second-person research/practice and, in large collaborative action research networks, third-person research/practice. The process emphasizes growth through group dialogue, reflection, and action. Participants may pursue individual studies bound together by a common theme, concern, or problem and then come together to share their work and develop a common set of recommendations for educational improvement. Or participants may form research teams to study one particular issue over time. Collaborative action research often involves school-university partnerships. Historically, this approach has been integral to the action research process from the very beginning; it will be elaborated in much detail in Chapter 5.

Teacher as Researcher

Perhaps the earliest effort to engage teachers as researchers can be found in the work of Lucy Sprague Mitchell. The first dean of women

at the University of California–Berkeley, she was friendly with John Dewey and greatly influenced by his writings. Committing her life to improving schools for children, she established the Bureau of Educational Experiments in New York City in 1916. She gathered a team of psychologists, a social worker, a doctor, and a number of classroom teachers around her to study jointly, in as free an atmosphere as possible, children, children's language development, teaching, and a variety of new experimental approaches to education. Eventually over time, while continuing to conduct research, the bureau expanded its mission to include developing a model teacher education program, which ultimately became the foundation for the Bank Street College of Education.

The contemporary teacher-as-researcher movement (involving first-, second-, and third-person research/practice) began in England with the work of Stenhouse (1975, 1983) and the Humanities Curriculum Project. Stenhouse, who coined the term "teacher-as-researcher," believed that teaching should be based on research, that the classroom was a natural laboratory for the study of teaching and learning, and that research and curriculum development were the privileged preserve of teachers. Building on the work of Stenhouse, the Ford Teaching Project focused on the self-monitoring role of teachers who examine their practices in collaborative action research study groups (Elliott, 1977, 2006; Elliott & Adelman, 1975). The ideas of Stenhouse, Elliott, Whitehead, and McNiff migrated to the United States, where they stimulated the further development and refinement of the concept of the teacher-as-researcher. In the meantime, the momentum for teacher action research in England continues to accelerate as reflected in the work of Whitehead and McNiff (2006).

As a burgeoning movement in the United States, teacher research has been defined by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) as "systematic intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work" (pp. 23–24). It is systematic in that it involves ordered ways of gathering data, documenting experiences, and producing a written record. It is intentional in that the research is planned and deliberate rather than spontaneous. It is inquiry in that the research emanates from or generates questions and "reflects teachers' desires to make sense of their experiences—to adapt a learning stance of openness toward classroom life" (p. 24).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) offer a working typology of teacher research that groups four types of teacher research into two broad categories: conceptual and empirical research. **Conceptual research** refers to theoretical/philosophical work or the analysis of

ideas. The focus of conceptual research is essays that deal with teachers' interpretations of the assumptions and characteristics of classroom and school life and/or the research itself. Empirical research refers to the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data gathered from teachers' own schools and classrooms. Under empirical research are listed three types of research: journals, oral inquiries, and classroom/school studies. **Journals** are teachers' written accounts of classroom life over time, including records of observations, analyses of experiences, and reflections and interpretations of practices. **Oral inquiries** are teachers' oral examinations of classroom/social issues, contexts, texts, and experiences including collaborative analyses and interpretations and explorations between cases and theories. **Classroom/school studies** are teachers' explorations of practice-based issues using data based on observation, interview, and document collection involving individual or collaborative work.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) place great emphasis on teachers' ways of knowing, teacher knowing through systematic subjectivity, and teacher emic or "insider's perspective that makes visible the ways students and teachers together construct knowledge and curriculum" (p. 43). They distinguish among three conceptions of teacher learning. The first of these is knowledge for practice, in which university researchers generate formal knowledge and theory for teachers to use to improve practice. Within this conception of teacher learning, teachers are viewed primarily as consumers of research. The second conception is knowledge in practice, in which the emphasis is on knowledge in action, knowledge that is embedded in the exemplary practice of experienced teachers. The knowledge in action conception suggests that good teaching can be coached and learned through reflective supervision or through a process of coaching reflective teaching. Learning is viewed as assisted performance. Both of these conceptions of teacher learning are hierarchical, distinguishing between expert and novice teachers as well as formal and practical knowledge.

The third conception of teacher learning is knowledge of practice, which assumes "that the knowledge teachers need to teach well emanates from systematic inquiries about teaching, learners and learning, subject matter and curriculum, and schools and schooling. This knowledge is constructed collectively within local and broader communities" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 279). Within this conception of teacher learning, there are no distinctions between formal and practical knowledge. Teachers are viewed as constructors and generators of knowledge and curriculum. Knowledges of practice and teacher

research are viewed as mutually interchangeable. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) argue that teacher inquiry is a powerful way of articulating local knowledge and for redefining and creating a new knowledge base for teaching and learning. They also advocate that teachers study "what is taken for granted," challenge "school and classroom structures and deliberate about what it means to know and what is regarded as expert knowledge . . . and attempt to uncover the values and interests served and not served by the arrangements of schooling" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 279).

One of the most distinctive and significant contributions Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) make to the teacher-as-researcher movement is their construct of **inquiry as stance,** which Cochran-Smith (2002) distinguished from "inquiry as a time-bounded project or activity within a teacher education course or professional development workshop" (p. 15). Inquiry as stance suggests an orientation to the construction of knowledge and its relationship to practice. With this stance, the work of teachers in generating local knowledge through inquiry communities is considered social and political, "making problematic the current arrangements of schooling, the ways knowledge is constructed, evaluated, and used, and teachers' individual and collective roles in bringing about change" (Cochran-Smith, 2002, p. 15). Inquiry as stance positions teachers to link their inquiry to larger questions about the ends of teacher learning in school reform and to larger social, political, and intellectual movements emphasizing that teacher learning for the next century needs to be understood as a long-term collective project with a democratic agenda.

The outcomes emerging from an inquiry stance are transformative (Cochran-Smith, 2002, pp. 12–34). One outcome is that teachers learn to raise questions and try to change routine practices challenging common expectations and reconceptualizing what teaching and learning are all about. A second outcome is that teachers question and challenge the external assumptions, values, and beliefs held by others regarding practice and the internal assumptions, values, and beliefs held by teachers themselves. Finally, an inquiry stance raises teachers' consciousness and develops awareness that decisions regarding all dimensions of teaching and learning need to weigh complex and sometimes conflicting values, information, and viewpoints. The inquiry stance characterizing teacher-as-researcher is more than an attitude and posture regarding inquiry; it is a transformative worldview of knowledge construction, teaching practice, and the nature of learning.

Participatory Action Research

One form of action research that emphasizes a recursive collaborative approach with the goal of taking political and social action is **participatory action research (PAR)**, sometimes referred to as emancipatory action research (Atweh, Kemmis, & Weeks, 1998; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; McIntyre, 2007). PAR originated in Latin America and in other third world countries and can be considered a prime example of engaging first-, second-, and third-person research (Fals Borda, 2001). PAR is a social participatory process that engages participants in the study of reality in order to change it. It assumes that ideology, epistemology, knowledge, and power are bound up together. It is emancipatory, helping people to "recover, and unshackle themselves from, the constraints of irrational, unproductive, unjust, and unsatisfying social structures which limit their self development and self determination" (Atweh et al., 1998, p. 24). It is also a collective critical process in which participants deliberately contest and reconstitute unproductive, unjust, and alienating ways of interpreting and describing their ways of working and ways of relating to others. Through spirals of critical and self-critical action and reflection, participants learn how they can change the ways they interact in their social world, democratize education and the research process, change power relations in the educational and social world through the production of "people's" knowledge, and empower oppressed groups to change their lives and circumstances.

PAR, translated into community-based action research (Stringer, 2007, p. 11), is enacted through an explicit set of social values:

- It is democratic, enabling the participation of all people.
- It is equitable, acknowledging people's equality of worth.
- It is liberating, providing freedom from oppressive, debilitating conditions.
- It is life enhancing, enabling the expression of people's full human potential.

A fundamental tenet of PAR is that knowledge and the research that produces knowledge are an exercise in politics as much as understanding. To understand research, one must not only explore methodology but also inquire about the ways knowledge is produced and the benefits, resources, advantages, and power that accrue to people who control the processes of knowledge production. The writing on PAR has an evangelical quality—its advocates often are quite critical not

only of traditional research models but of any kind of research, including other kinds of action research that are nonparticipatory and that do not have transformative goals for creating a more just and humane society. For example, Kemmis (1988) critiques educational action research as being too individualistic, saying that it has been "captured and domesticated in individualistic classroom research, which has failed to establish links with political forces for democratic educational reform." He then goes on to argue that it is only through exploration of more collective processes that the "genuine possibility of changing education from within" can be achieved.

Such collective processes are found in the participatory action research process practiced in Latin America, which reflects the work of Paulo Freire and embraces collective thinking, dialogue, and action and several other features that distinguish this form of action research:

- The point of departure in the research is a vision of social reality as a totality.
- The community is fully involved and actively participates in the research process.
- Social processes and structures are understood within a historical perspective.
- Theory and practice are integrated.
- The subject-object relationship is transformed into a subject-subject relationship through dialogue.
- Research and action (including education itself) become a single process.
- The synchronic and quantitative nature of traditional research is replaced by a diachronic orientation and an integration of quantitative and qualitative elements.
- The community researchers collaborate to produce critical knowledge aimed at social transformation.
- The results of research are immediately applied to a concrete situation with the goal of radically transforming social reality and improving the lives of people.

Participatory action research "is a process that is biased in favor of the least powerful." It seeks "to bring all the parties together in a way which gives those with less historic, cultural, or economic voice a more prominent place at the table" (Hall, 2001, p. 175). This perspective, reflecting the signifying feature of PAR as a politically liberating process, has been brought to educational inquiry by Carr, Kemmis, and McTaggart, among others. Their argument for a fundamental

transformation of education through collaborative emancipatory research embraces the liberating concept of teachers, students, and community constructing knowledge to change themselves, their educational institutions, and their communities.

Schoolwide Action Research

Schoolwide action research (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007; Calhoun, 1993, 1994, 2002; Clauset, Lick, & Murphy, 2008) is different from individual teacher research or from collaborative action research, in which a group of teachers conducts research or everyone in the school is involved in the research. It's a way of saying, "Let's study what's happening at our school, decide if we can make it a better place by changing what and how we teach and how we relate to students and the community; study the effects; and then begin again" (Calhoun, 1994, p. 4). Schoolwide action research reflects Schaefer's concept of the school as a center of inquiry. It engages first-, second-, and third-person research/practices.

To facilitate collective inquiry and action of the magnitude involved in this kind of action research, Calhoun (2002) has developed the Schoolwide Action Research Matrix, which includes a place to identify the student learning goal that a faculty selects for its collective focus as well as six domains, or cells, of inquiry and action. The structure of the matrix is designed to help groups study and use on-site and external information about student learning and the learning environment to establish benchmarks and desired levels of performance for students and to identify interventions and actions to study and implement in their classrooms and schools. The sequence of the matrix is designed to help staff explore the research base and move beyond what is currently known or done in their school or setting. However, it is only a guide to domains of inquiry and action, not a rigid set of steps.

Schoolwide action research seeks to improve the school as a problem-solving entity, to improve equity for students, and to involve the entire school community in the process of inquiry, thereby creating a knowledge democracy. It is a process of conducting inquiry about the school to improve teaching and learning and to make the school a self-renewing organization permeated by inquiry. The challenge inherent in schoolwide action research is that it calls for full participation on the part of all members in the school to identify issues for inquiry, to agree on improvement goals, to collect and analyze data, to draw implications and develop plans and recommendations for action, to try out actions and collect data on the schoolwide impact of these

improvement efforts, and then repeat the research cycle again, investigating new questions that emanate from the inquiry.

This is a tall order when we think of facilitating the group processes that are involved in dealing with resistance to change and in building schoolwide trust, consensus, collaboration, reflection, commitment, problem solving, and a culture of sustained inquiry. It is one thing for five or six members of a collaborative action research team to work on these issues, which require empathic listening skills, critical dialogue, mutual support, and the freedom to confront and disagree with each other in facilitative ways. These processes are complex and take an enormous amount of time and energy to nurture and develop in a small group, let alone an entire school. Schoolwide action research also requires administrative support at the school and the district level. Schoolwide action research may be the most complex kind of action research to conduct:

> Schoolwide action research may feel messy and uneven, and conflict may arise during the first few cycles—all of which is to be expected when a diverse community is learning to apply a complex process. However, the very complexity generates important side effects: chiefly that all participants have to learn a lot about building colleagueship, about managing the group process, and about aspects of curriculum and instruction that they may not have reflected on had they worked alone. (Calhoun, 1994, p. 12)

As an approach for change, schoolwide action research is strongly affected by the culture of the school. Four cultural markers predict whether action research will be a force for change in a school (Sagor & Curley, 1991):

1. A common focus. In schools where action research took hold, there was clarity about school goals, priorities were protected, and there were high expectations.
2. A collective locus of control (efficacy). In schools that embraced action research, a significant cultural factor was the faculty's collective sense of efficacy. In these schools, faculty felt they had the collective power to change teaching and learning in meaningful ways.
3. Common cultural perceptions. In schools where action research made a difference, faculty members perceived their school culture in strikingly similar ways. In schools struggling with

action research, teachers had widely varying perceptions of school norms.

4. An appreciation of leadership. In schools that persevered with action research, teachers saw that their work was supported by the school's leadership, that the leadership was committed to high expectations, and that there was an appreciation of leadership, whether it came from administrators or teachers.

One form of schoolwide research is found in "whole-faculty study groups" (Clauset et al., 2008; Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2008; Lick, 2000; Lick & Murphy, 2006; Murphy & Lick, 2005). In whole-faculty study groups, the entire faculty of a school participates in study groups, with each group responsible for conducting inquiry focusing on a specific aspect of school improvement and change. The driving question for faculty study groups is: What is happening differently in the classroom as a result of what you are doing and learning in study groups? The fundamental goal of the whole-faculty study group process is to facilitate schoolwide change and enhance student learning. "Whole-faculty study groups are teacher centered, inspire reflection, provide authentic learning experiences, and motivate teachers to go beyond traditional boundaries and construct new learnings and meaning" (Lick, 2000, p. 44).

Schoolwide action research as a strategy to reform schools has been promoted through the Coalition for Essential Schools, League of Professional Schools in Georgia, the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University, and the Center for Leadership in School Reform in Kentucky. It is being used by the Broward County Schools of South Florida as a framework for long-term whole school renewal. I believe the greatest promise for schoolwide action research is found in the concept of the professional development school (PDS). A PDS is a long-term partnership between a university, a local school district, and the community dedicated to improving education for children through the improvement of preservice and in-service teacher education, instructional and curriculum development, educational change, and inquiry. University faculty collaborate with classroom teachers, parents, and school administrators, working on site in a local school or schools to turn the school into a site for teacher education and research. Within the context of the PDS, schoolwide research has been employed to implement a new mathematics curriculum and instructional approach in an elementary school, to restructure a middle school, to integrate instructional technology throughout the entire curriculum of a high school, and to integrate

student action research in every content area in a middle school. The school change agenda of PDSs seems to be a congenial home for the implementation of schoolwide action research and, subsequently, the creation of knowledge democracies.

Self-Study Research

There is a growing interest in the **self-study** of teacher education practice in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia (Cole & Knowles, 1996a, 1996b; Hamilton, 1998; Knowles & Cole, 1996; Loughran, Hamilton, LaBoskey, & Russell, 2004; Loughran & Russell, 2002; Mitchell, O'Reilly-Scanlon, & Weber, 2006; Russell & Korthagen, 1995; Zeichner, 2007). Self-study is a form of action research or teacher research that focuses inwardly on teacher education and, in some instances, professional development (Dantonio, 2001) in a "no holds barred" way, leaving no area of teacher education sacrosanct from inquiry. The growth of self-study is represented in the establishment of the Self Study of Teacher Education Practices, a special interest group (SIG) of the American Educational Research Association, which was established in 1994 and grew rapidly into one of the largest SIGs in AERA.

Self-study in teacher education has two broad purposes: facilitating personal-professional development of teacher educators, in which studies focus primarily on the improvement of an individual's own teaching; and developing deeper understanding of teacher education practices, processes, programs, and contexts, in which studies focus on broader programmatic and institutional issues. Although these purposes are not necessarily mutually exclusive, they are concerned with refining, reforming, and rearticulating teacher education (Cole & Knowles, 1996b, p. 1). In reforming the work of educating teachers, self-study examines teacher education practice in a critical and probing way, primarily through reflective, qualitative, personal, subjective, and practically oriented inquiry, which is typically communicated in narrative form. Like other forms of action research, self-study can be conducted individually, for example via an autobiographical self-study of one's evolution as a teacher educator (Samaras, 2002), or collaboratively, using a wide range of research methodologies (Loughran & Russell, 2002).

Just as teachers conduct inquiry about teaching and learning practices and issues, in self-study, teacher-educators conduct research about their own practices. They examine their own teaching; program issues; contradictions between espoused values and program practices; the

tensions, dilemmas, and concerns embedded in practice; issues of social justice, race, and gender; questions of control and power; the social and political contexts of practice; the cultural modalities of practice; the "telling and showing" model of teaching; unexamined program assumptions; and new ways of knowing.

In examining the scholarship in teacher education, Zeichner (1996) asserts that self-study is "probably the most significant development ever in the field of teacher education research" (p. 8). Although self-study appears to be a burgeoning movement in teacher education, it struggles to move from a marginalized activity to a respected and legitimate form of inquiry. Critics of self-study charge that it is narcissistic, solipsistic, self-indulgent, low-quality inquiry. There is considerable concern about the validity and trustworthiness of self-study research. Feldman (2003, pp. 27–28), responding to these critiques, argues that it is a moral obligation for self-study researchers to attend to the question of validity and suggests four ways to increase the validity of self-study:

1. Self-study research needs to clearly and carefully describe in detail how data are collected and make explicit what counts as data in the research.
2. Self-study research needs to clearly and carefully describe in detail how representation was constructed from the data. For example, if readers had some knowledge or insight into the way the researcher transformed data into artistic representation, it would increase the validity of the representation.
3. Self-study research needs to "extend triangulations beyond multiple ways to represent the same case study. Because one data set can lead to a variety of representations, it is important to show why one has been chosen over the others" (Feldman, 2003, p. 28).
4. Self-study research needs to "provide evidence of the value of the changes in our ways of being teacher educators" (Feldman, 2003, p. 28). There should be some evidence of the values of any changes in one's ways of being a teacher-educator. Such evidence can make a convincing case for the validity of the self-study.

Dinkelman (2003) offers a five-part theoretical rationale for promoting the use of self-study in teacher education programs, arguing that

> self-study has the potential to animate the idea of teaching as reflection, generate knowledge about promoting reflective practice, model an inquiry-based approach to pedagogy, provide opportunities for beginning teachers to reflect on learning to teach, and generate rich understanding that can be used to facilitate program change. (p. 16)

Self-study is viewed by its practitioners as a means to liberate teacher education from the conservative and confining epistemology and traditions of higher education. The ultimate goal of self-study is reform—the systemic and substantive transformation of teacher education through sustained inquiry. Unfortunately, most universities have not "elevated the status of action research in their institutions enough for it to count as a powerful tool for transforming their own teacher education programs" (Catelli, Padovano, & Costello, 2000, p. 237).

❖ SUMMARY

In this chapter, the history, origins, and development of action research are traced, and different approaches to action research are described. Varieties of action research have arisen as alternatives to traditional positivistic scientific research approaches that cannot reasonably be adapted to the turbulent changing school contexts in which the research is applied. The traditional positivistic scientific approach to research requires the temporary suspension of attention to surrounding conditions, changing contexts, and evolving circumstances. An action research approach to the study of change in teaching and learning would have to reflect in its criteria the applied dynamic and recursive nature of teaching and the ongoing need for teachers to act, a need that cannot be deferred until research results have achieved a preestablished level of certainty. The approach would recognize, for example, that regardless of the state of the research dealing with how young children learn to read, teachers would go on teaching reading and literacy.

The importance of shifting contextual circumstances and of circumstances only secondarily related to the focus of the study would need to be given attention at the very least by not assuming that all else would remain constant while the teachers and the school are under study. In addition, any action researcher would need to acknowledge

the continuous cultural shifts in human behavior that are likely to render any conclusions obsolete within a relatively short period of time. What are the criteria, then, that would distinguish action research as a paradigm for studying educational action and change in classrooms and schools? This is the question I address in Chapter 3.