

Appendices

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Appendix 1: Invitation to participate

Developing Research Capabilities in FE Lecturers through Practitioner-led Research

UHI has been given an ESCalate grant of £4000 to develop research skills in FE lecturers. The three main UHI partner colleges are:
Inverness (Ann McKay)
Perth (Nanette Pearson)
Lews Castle (Stornoway Ian Minty)

In addition the project involves the participation of:
University of Edinburgh (Dr Elisabet Weedon)
Queen Margaret University College Edinburgh (Dr Kate Morss and Dr Pete Cannell))

The project aims to develop basic research skills. It will do this through your planning and carrying out a small-scale project, linked to a relevant literature search, that relates to one aspect of your teaching practice.

We hope that it will:

- encourage the development of a community of researching practitioners, connected by an online discussion group to support you, the practitioners.
- develop your research and collaborative skills;
- provide greater insight and understanding of teaching and learning
- encourage reflection on teaching and learning and potentially impact on future delivery.

We are looking for 6 lecturers who would be prepared to become involved in the project. There is a project participation fee paid to each lecturer of £250. (If people prefer to work in pairs, each individual participant will receive £125).

You will need to

- attend a one day project workshop in Inverness on Saturday April 30
- agree to work collaboratively with the project team
- engage in a small action research programme between May 05-March 06.
- Attend a second one-day end-of-project workshop sometime in April 06.

In return, you will receive:

- Dedicated support from the project team
- A guided and supported chance to “dip your toe” in action research
- A chance to contribute to a journal article at the end of the project
- Travel costs and expenses for attending the two workshops at the beginning and end of the project.

What you need to do now ?

If you're interested in taking part, please email

ian.minty@lews.uhi.ac.uk

and set down in no more than 500 words why you'd like to take part. This to reach me no later than Friday March 18, 2005.

Appendix 2: Proforma for workshop 1

Action Research planning

Please complete this proforma and bring it to the workshop on 30th April. Don't worry if you can't answer all the questions – one of the aims of the workshop is to help you to continue to engage with the process of clarifying the research question and the research method.

- 1 What is the evidence of/intuition about the likely difficulty, problem or desirable improvement to be made?
- 2 What are your 'hunches' - if any - about the likely causes and outcomes?
- 3 What exactly will you need to investigate? Can you formulate the nature of the investigation in two or three key questions?
- 4 What is already known about it – how might you find out more about this topic?
- 5 What will you need to know in order to assist your key questions? What data will need to be collected in order to acquire such knowledge? Who might you need/want to work with?
- 6 What are the likely sources of data? Where, when and how can data be collected?
- 7 Reflect on the ways in which data might be collected. List the data gathering exercises and the collection techniques to be employed.
- 8 How will observations for each exercise or stage be recorded?
- 9 What will be the likely scale, timing and location of each exercise?
- 10 How will data from each exercise be analysed? Will they be quantifiable? Will you have to make qualitative judgements? If so, how?

Any additional notes and/or questions for the workshop?

Proforma adapted from an idea in Power, R., Naysmith, J., Coats, M. (2003) *Action Research: A Guide for Associate Lecturers*, Open University

Appendix 3: Workshop 1 programme

ESCalate Action Research Workshop Programme 30th April 2005

Participants:

Activity	Time	Lead person	Resources
Introduction: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Aims of project ○ Participants (all – including us) ○ Overview of day 	10.30 – 10.45	Project team leader	
Overview of Action Research	10.45 – 11.15	Project team	
Work through proforma – work in pairs and discuss ideas – refine and develop proforma + identify gaps that need to be filled	11.15 – 13.00 Plenary last 15 mins to share ideas	Participants with help from facilitators	Use proforma as starting point, maybe have more blank ones for revision! Use flipchart to record all ideas for plenary
Lunch	13.00 – 13.45		
Revisit action research and the role of the literature in helping you get ideas, building on what others have done, finding ideas for methods and analysis	13.45 – 14.15	Project team	Use summaries of article that has been read
Revisit and refine project and identify next steps This could include research methods needs; data analysis needs; (and eventually) how to report on findings Set up communication channels for all – this may include a discussion board of some form + everybody's emails. Allocate mentors for participants + have tea and final chat ... !	14.15 – 15.30	Each 'mentor' sets up communication channel with participant	Return to ideas recorded on flipchart Possibly lead to suggested reading both in terms of specific topic of project and particular methods that may be of use – produce reading list to be circulated to all. One of us agrees to collate all email addresses (could possibly be done beforehand) and also to set up and communicate access to discussion board.

Overall aims of the workshop:

- To help participants to identify a project that is feasible within the timescale of our overall project
- To help participants to identify their own needs in relation to research skills for their particular project (at some point we may wish to show how this fits in to more general development of research skills??)
- To set up communication channels between whole group and also between individual participants and participants and mentor
- To agree to a feasible timetable (do we want to ask participants to post brief summaries on discussion board as they progress their projects – and to do so at regular intervals – even if it is to report that they have not progressed due to difficulties ??)

Appendix 4: Powerpoint presentation: Action Research

Action Research

Escalate
Elisabet Weedon & Pete Cannell April 2005

1

Strategy

- Action research is a strategy for research not a method – action researchers may use a very wide variety of methods to collect their data.

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What is action research?

- Action research can be described as a family of research methodologies which pursue action (or change) and research (or understanding) at the same time.
- It does this by using a cyclic or spiral process which alternates between action and critical reflection and (in the later cycles) continuously refining methods, data and interpretation in the light of the understanding developed in the earlier cycles.

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The Action Research cycle

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One definition

- It aims to feed practical judgement in concrete situations, and the validity of the 'theories' or hypotheses it generates depends not so much on 'scientific' tests of truth, as on their usefulness in helping people to act more intelligently and skilfully. Theories are validated through practice.' (Elliott, 1991 in Bell, 1999, p.9)

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Planning

- What is the problem?
- What is our big idea?
- What could we do to change the situation?

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It is ...

- Collective self-reflective enquiry in social situations
- Collaborative
- An attempt to improve understanding of practice
- An attempt to modify practice
- Critical

(from Kemmis & McTaggart 1988)

4

Action

- Background
- Designing the change
- Methodology of intervention

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It isn't ...

- The usual thinking that teachers do about their teaching
- Simply problem solving
- Research done on other people
- The 'scientific method'

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Observation

- Collecting valid and reliable data
- From whom?
- How?
- Triangulation

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Reflection



- Interpreting the findings
- Evaluating the action(s)
- Answering the research question

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So to summarise

- Practical and integrated with practice (not bolted on to practice!)
- Seeking change
- Cyclical
- Participatory
- More than Schon's reflective practitioner
Reflection + Research Techniques + systematic investigation

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Next cycle

On the basis of the first cycle



- Evaluate the outcomes
- Revise the action plan
- Monitor the new change
- Next attempt to change
- Revise the action plan again OR agree that the changes have worked

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A case study – one practitioners experience of action research

- Feedback studies .. Or Kelly projects
 - Explored students' perceptions of comments provided by tutor on correspondence tuition
- Student led study group
 - Explored students' ability to set up and maintain a self help study group

Both were related to own practice in terms of supporting students

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Another case study – modifying assessment

- Change assessment regime
- Evaluate students' perceptions using AEQ
- Analyse
- Change again
- Evaluate again

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Issues

- Ethics
 - Consent
 - Confidentiality
 - Who really benefits
- Theory and practice
 - Do you need theory
 - Tacit or explicit

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Appendix 5: Suggested report format to be used for second workshop

I agreed to suggest a proforma for responding to the three questions/headings below

1. A brief report which includes a summary of the work that you have done so far;
2. How has being involved in this project informed your work and developed your research skills? And
3. How has the research benefited you professionally?

For (1), the report on your work so far, I would suggest you use what I call 'the empirical report format' which would include the following type headings (please note that several research texts will include a section on reports and you may find what they suggest more helpful):

- Introduction:** to include the background of your research, *what* you are actually researching and *why* this is worthy of research. You should also include a reference to any *other research* on the same/similar topic if you have read any (I suspect this might not be the case for all of you)
- Methodology:** An outline of how you actually conducted your research. This should include your sample/participants and any relevant contextual background about this sample (e.g. in Mandi's case the subject areas taught, the type of students etc.), an outline of your data collection tools and how you actually collected the data.
- Findings and analysis of the findings:** The results of your research and an analysis of these results. If appropriate you may wish to set out the results in a table (but it depends on what you have done). If you have interview data from several respondents based on the same interview schedule you may wish to look at the responses across your sample for each of the questions before doing further analysis.
- Discussion and conclusion:** In this section you would try to interpret your results and set them into the wider context. This may include looking at themes that emerge from the data. You may also want to explore your actual methodology ... what would happen if you had a different sample? Are the results likely to be the same?

If you find yourself short of time try to summarise key points for each of these sections ... so that you end up with something like (perhaps) a 4 page report with key points under each heading.

For 2 and 3 (and I have just noticed that 3 is almost the same as the first part of 2 I would suggest a brief A4 sheet responding to each of these:

1. Development of research skills – a set of bullet points setting out the main ones that you feel you have developed (either ones that are new to you or ones that you now feel you know better) with a brief explanation of how and why
2. Professional benefit – again a set of bullet points with some examples of where you feel this research has influenced your practice

3. finally you may also want to include something like: if I had the opportunity to do this again I would And next I would like to ...

I hope this helpful – it is intended as a suggestion of how you might tackle it – if you have any alternative suggestions/additions/amendments please post these on the discussion board!

Appendix 6: Summaries of participants' project topics

Participant 1:

1. *What was your initial proposal? Please briefly outline.*

Focus on special needs students who have been at college 10 yrs. I had set up a cafe at college where these students were working. Project was to investigate how I could do more to help them 'go further' by developing skills that would enable them to leave here (college). How could I 'move them on' by supporting them? Was I helping too much, giving too much supervision (and by inference, possibly holding them back)? Was I meeting their needs? Was I meeting the demands of the inclusion agenda? I saw a whole lot of attributes in these students and I wanted to know if I was helping develop these. This was to be their last year, so I wanted to know how effective I was in helping them to 'move on'.

2. *What made you decide on this particular area?*

I wanted to look at this area because I am so passionate about special needs

3. *What kind of research did you end up doing?*

I thought I was going to just look at theory but it ended up being action research – which is what the project was about. I got feedback from customers by asking them to fill out questionnaires. I asked for feedback from my colleagues after peer observation. I also interviewed students and asked them what they want to do and what they thought about the support they were getting.

4. *If you made changes to the project or approach, what were they and what prompted the changes?*

I added the peer observation and asked for colleagues to give me feedback on my actions and behaviour, and I incorporated a few more questions in the questionnaire.

Participant 2

1. *What was your initial proposal? Please briefly outline.*

My research project was to find out if students could design their own typographic style which might make reading, and therefore comprehension, easier. I have completed the work I intended to do and have found that there is probably no advantage in doing this.

2. *What made you decide on this particular area?*

I wanted to follow this line of enquiry because I was aware that software is available which allows a template to be set for an individual typographic style and it does seem likely (from literature and from the result of a previous project) that typography can have an effect on comprehension. This means that my future efforts can be towards finding the best individual font for student handouts.

3. *What kind of research did you end up doing?*

In this study it seemed to make little difference to most subjects' ability to read a piece of text whether the font was designed by themselves or whether the material was presented in a pre-designed format (that design being chosen by myself as the most likely to be read with ease).

Although there are moves afoot to allow students to download and format their own text using an individually designed template, it does not appear to be relevant to their ability to read text.

Since the results of this experiment were negative, it seems reasonable not to pursue the line of enquiry and that the next step to finding the best typographic style for handouts will be to test Arial against the fonts specifically designed for readability – Verdana and Georgia.

Participant 3

1. *What was your initial proposal? Please briefly outline.*

School leavers' poor motivation, immaturity, lack of concentration and dependency are frequently cited as reasons for this. The Secondary school system is often blamed by FE lecturers for producing pupils who are 'spoon fed' rather than autonomous learners.

2. *What made you decide on this particular area?*

Although the problems of teaching school leavers are regularly voiced by lecturers, the explicit opinions of young students are seldom heard. There has not been any proactive attempt to ascertain the views and feelings of school leavers themselves. Feedback is obtained through the standardised student evaluation system and I have listened to school leavers state they are worried about getting 'into trouble' from lecturers if they write down negative feedback about teaching. Similarly class representatives at course team meetings find it difficult to talk openly at a meeting dominated by the lecturers.

3. *What kind of research did you end up doing?*

To meet this aim the following research questions became the focus of my enquiry

- What were the learning experiences of the 16-18 year old age group?
- What did they feel about the teaching and learning on their course?
- What are the key issues for lecturers in teaching school leavers ?

Prior to undertaking the research project I read widely, including previous research about the transition from school to college

Participant 4

1 *What was your initial proposal?*

Bringing the themes of employability and disability together, **my research study aimed to explore how QMUC works to improve the employability of its disabled students**. I wished to investigate examples of learning and teaching practice and activities that promote certain defined employability skills and to find answers to the following:

- How are programme leaders enhancing disabled students' employability?
- What are disabled students' perceptions of activities to enhance their employability?
- What developments would staff and disabled students like to see to enhance current practice?

2

What made you decide on this particular area?

My interest in this subject area came about through my work during the previous year as Head of Student Services. The remit of Student Services is wide in supporting students of all abilities to get the most from their time studying at QMUC and to succeed in their aim of achieving a degree or other qualification. Part of this is to deliver a dedicated support and advice service to disabled students, while at the same time advising and keeping the institution up-to-date with its duties and liabilities

in regard to disability issues. Another part of my role is working collaboratively to promote and embed employability within QMUC .

There were four separate but interlinking issues driving my attention to the particular area of disabled students' employability, these being disability duty, teachability, the employability enhancement theme, and employers needs.

I wanted to know what went on within the institution relating to disabled students' employability and how we could improve on this. I could then use the outcomes to influence future planning.

3 *What kind of research did you end up doing?*

I developed the project proposal, 2 information sheets (one aimed at programme leaders and the other at students), and 2 questionnaires ...again one for PLs and a draft for students that would be refined in response to the returns from the PLs. I had to seek ethical approval, which I succeeded in gaining. This process made me think very clearly about what I wanted to do, and how I was going to do it. It also gave me a big confidence boost when I got the approval.

Unfortunately due to pressure of work, I have not completed the research project. However I still intend to do so and hope to complete by the end of this academic year (06/07).

4 *If you made changes to the project or approach, what were they and what prompted the changes?*

I have learnt that the research process needs more resource (particularly time) than I thought and if I were to plan another project in the future, I would ensure that sufficient time was set aside for it. I received a lot of advice, support and encouragement from the Centre for Academic Practice. This was very helpful and made me realise how important is it to have someone to talk things over with and bounce ideas off, so although I didn't use the 'official' mentor I did have someone close by who was acting in a similar position.

Although I haven't completed so far it has still been worthwhile taking part, and though I am somewhat frustrated at myself for not doing so, I have not lost the up-to-now hidden desire to become involved in research and to develop competence in this area.

Participant 5

1. *What was your initial proposal? Please briefly outline.*

The project was meant to be about leadership in sports.

2. *What made you decide on this particular area?*

The project was to link with development of a new programme at our college.

3. *What kind of research did you end up doing?*

I started on the lit review, made notes on the topic, then began to realise I needed to limit the scope of the project. It wasn't focused enough.

I also started a research journal in which I made notes about my thoughts. I did go off in tangents but it was a good place to keep track of my thinking. I still keep up with this journal.

Appendix 7: Evaluation of Escalate project

Outline of evaluation for *Escalate* project

The aim is to evaluate the effectiveness of the workshop and the ongoing support in developing

- The participants' understanding of action research
- The participants' confidence to tackle and complete an action research project

Data will be collected from:

1. The participants initial statements.
2. Pre and post workshop feedback forms. These would look for open responses. The pre-workshop form would ask for a statement about expectations from the day. The post-workshop form would ask about the extent to which expectations had been met, what the key outcomes from the day had been and what are perceived as the immediate challenges after the event.
3. Observation of the workshop – taking notes on key issues that arise (conducted by either two of the team).
4. Telephone interviews with participants and mentors to be held towards the end of the project.