"It simply
makes us better":

Learning from

Literacy Research

in Practice Networks

in the UK, Australia

and the United States

A Resource for Literacy Research
in Practice in Canada

"It simply makes us better"

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Research in Practice
in Canada

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Acknowledgements

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The information in this resource was gathered in 1999 - 2000 and updated to July 2001. Website addresses were checked at the time of publication.

Preface

"It simply makes us better" is a resource for people interested in adult literacy research in practice. It is based on a study of eleven research in practice networks or projects in the UK, Australia and the USA.

In the first part of the resource, you'll find ideas for planning and supporting research in practice, based on information from the eleven networks. Starting with an overview of purposes for networks, Part 1 includes information about how these networks are organized and funded, who participates in the networks, and how participants are supported to do research. Details about each network are included in Part 2. The appendices include information about recent research in practice initiatives in Canada and a bibliography of research in practice publications.

As a reader of this resource, you might be based in a literacy program, a college, or university, and you likely have one or more roles as a teacher, coordinator, administrator, consultant or researcher. You might conduct research on a regular basis, or as time allows. Whatever your context and experience, we hope this resource provides ideas to support your work and links you with others who share your interests.

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The Networks

Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (RaPAL) is an independent voluntary research and practice organization in the UK. www.literacy.lancaster.ac.uk/rapal/rapal.htm

Adult Literacy and Numeracy Research Consortium (ALNARC) is a national Australian collaboration for research into adult literacy and numeracy. www.staff.vu.edu.au/alnarc

The **National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research (NCELTR) Action Research Projects** involve teachers from across Australia in practitioner research. www.nceltr.mq.edu.au/amep/index.html

The **Adult Multiple Intelligences (AMI) Study** in New England involved teachers in collaborative planning and implementing of projects related to AMI theory. (Completed in 2001) http://pzweb.harvard.edu/ami

Bridges to Practice in California used Online Action Research (OAR) to support research and communication about topics concerning adults with learning disabilities.

Georgia Adult Literacy Inquiry Network (GALPIN) aimed to contribute to the professional growth of teachers by promoting and strengthening inquiry based staff development. (Discontinued in 1999)

The **Kentucky Practitioner Inquiry Projects** involve practitioners in action research teams to address issues of student retention and related issues. www.state.ky.us/agencies/wforce/daelnewsletter/page13.html

Pennsylvania Action Research Network (PAARN) aims to help ABE, GED and ESL educators develop more problem-posing skills and improve practice, using action research as a method. www.learningfrompractice/org/paarn/default.htm

Pennsylvania Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Network (PALPIN) encourages critical inquiry as an alternative form of professional development. www.learningfrompractice/org/palpin/default.htm

Project IDEA in Texas encourages research as an alternative form of staff professional development across the state.

The **Virginia Adult Education Research Network (VAERN)** encourages practitioner research among adult educators in Virginia. www.vcu.edu/aelweb/resguide/resguide1.html

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Possibilities and Challenges for Research in Practice Networks

Introduction

Adult literacy *research in practice* is not a new concept in Canada. Literacy educators have engaged in research since the contemporary literacy field started to evolve. However, systematic efforts to encourage and support literacy research in practice in Canada are relatively recent.

A growing interest in literacy research in practice was the catalyst to develop this resource. We were aware of research in practice networks in other countries, and we believed we could learn from others' experiences. With this in mind, we collected information about eleven networks through face-to-face and telephone interviews, an online survey, websites and published documents.

From the information collected, we developed descriptions of each network (see Part 2). We also identified approaches and challenges to supporting research in practice, which is the focus of Part 1.

We use the term "research in practice" to refer to literacy research conducted by or with people directly engaged in adult literacy teaching and learning. Horsman and Norton (1999) used the term to include a range of ways that literacy practitioners might engage in research, including reading and responding to research, reflecting on practice in light of research, applying research findings to practice and conducting research about practice.

The term "network" refers to organized and coordinated ways literacy practitioners are helped and supported to connect research to practice and to conduct research or inquiry into their own practices.

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Of the eleven networks we surveyed, three are national in scope. These are RaPAL in the UK, and ALNARC and the NCELTR Action Research Projects in Australia. The USA networks are state-based, except for the AMI study, which included six New England States. Although some networks were term-certain or project-based, others are ongoing. Some networks have histories of five, ten or more years.

It should be noted that the breadth and detail of information that we collected varies among the networks. For this reason, descriptions of some networks are more detailed than others and references to some are more frequent. Also, given varied contexts and histories, the networks vary in structure and funding, intentions, membership and activities. In naming common approaches and identifying ones that are unique, we don't intend to suggest that one approach is better than another. Our purpose is to discuss some viable options and raise points for reflection.

Why support research in practice?

As you review the descriptions in Part 2, you'll see that the networks' aims range from improving practice in classrooms to informing policy about literacy provision. Differences in intentions relate to the context and scope of the networks, as well as to how they are structured and funded. Some networks focus mainly on supporting practitioners to conduct research, while others support practitioner research as part of a larger research or advocacy mandate.

Although all of the networks encourage research in practice, one network, RaPAL, has a number of additional broader purposes, such as advocating "for the rights of adults to the full range of literacies in their lives." Thus, as well as encouraging research in practice, RaPAL has some aims in common with literacy organizations and coalitions concerned with advocacy.

From a review of the networks' aims and from responses to surveys, we identified a number of interwoven reasons to support research in practice (See Figure 1).
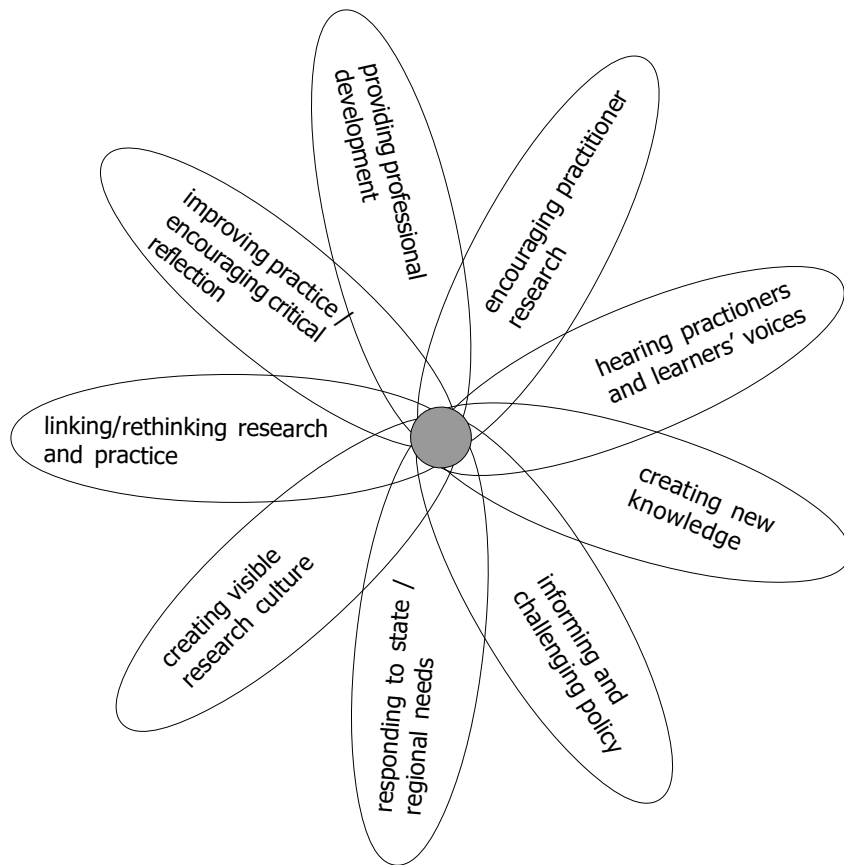
Figure 1. Reasons for supporting research in practice

Linking / Rethinking research and practice

Linking research and practice is a common intention of the research in practice networks included in this resource.

The goal of creating links is often challenged by conventional understandings of research and practice, which can divide researchers and practitioners and their different contexts. Practitioners may question the value of some research for their practice and may not see themselves in researcher roles. The merit of practitioner research also may be questioned by some researchers in academic settings.

"How do you establish interesting research without the knowledge of the practice? Research in practice informs and teaches others." (if)[1]

"There is an ongoing debate. . . [Some] academics oppose it and question if it is valid research" (if)

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[1]Quotes are from surveys or interviews. Initials refer to the person quoted.

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". . .you've actually got to do a lot of work thinking together and redefinition of what you're all doing in order to make that link." (mh)

However, when researchers and practitioners have opportunities to talk and work together, there may be possibilities not only to bridge the divides but to rethink and redefine both research and practice. Several of the networks advocate that linking research and practice requires collaborative redefinition of what researchers and practitioners do.

The networks used various approaches to link researchers and practitioners from different contexts, including:

- supporting practitioners to do research;
- having experienced researchers mentor practitioners who are new to research;
- involving university faculty and literacy practitioners in the network;
- consulting with practitioners and others involved in literacy practice about topics for research;
- creating opportunities for researchers and practitioners to talk and work together.

Improving practice / Encouraging critical reflection

"It simply makes us better. When you take a critical look at the way you do things, you open yourself up for ways to improve." (th)

A number of networks identified improved practice as the primary purpose for research in practice. Networks tended to focus on improvement or change within programs, but some aimed to influence practice across their regions, states, or more widely.

Learning research skills was also seen as a means to sharpen one's ability to observe practice on an ongong basis and to encourage critically reflective thinking.

"Instructors involved in research become better teachers by using research procedures and thinking in practice; i.e., reflective practice." (jt)

An evaluation of PAARN's work over five years found that the majority of the network's participants made lasting changes in their practice and in their agencies through action research. Other networks reported ongoing changes in practice.

> *"[Research is] capable of transforming people's practice. [It] doesn't eliminate all problems but is transformative and renewing."*

Providing professional development / Encouraging practitioner research

In some networks, research in practice is viewed as an alternative to professional development activities, such as short workshops, where information and strategies are conveyed to practitioners. Research in practice engages practitioners in posing and solving problems about their practice.

A challenge to encouraging practitioner research has to do with "identity"; namely, whether practitioners see themselves as researchers or potential researchers.

Mentoring and peer support are some ways to help practitioners come to see themselves as researchers. Seeing and hearing examples of research by other practitioners, as well as completing research themselves, can change self-concepts.

"Teachers have experiences and stories about practice. Research enables them to provide evidence and authority to support their claims." (jm)

Hearing practitioners and learners' voices / Creating new knowledge

Research in practice is seen as a way for both practitioners and learners' voices to be heard. Research processes enable practitioners to examine their own and learners' experiences systematically and document and share them in ways that will be attended to in their workplaces.

By sharing their findings and linking them to other research, researchers in practice engage in the process of building knowledge. Thus, research in practice broadens both knowledge and the scope of who participates in knowledge creation.

Situating practitioners as creators of knowledge poses challenges for research in practice, both in terms of practitioners' identities and in terms of how practitioner research might be compared with research from traditional academic settings. Similarly, practice-based research can raise challenges for traditional academically-based research.

"Teachers need to be involved in creating knowledge about teaching and learning. They need to be involved in the knowledge production process; it is a necessary part of learning." (cd)

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Informing and challenging policy

For some networks, research in practice is seen as a means to inform policy. One national network, ALNARC, specifically aims to contribute to policy development in relation to the provision of adult literacy and numeracy. RaPAL, another national network, explicitly supports theories of language and learning which emphasize the importance of social context in literacy acquisition. RaPAL, the only organization among the networks without government funding, also aims to critique policy and practice where it is based on simplistic notions of literacy as skill acquisition. (Relationships between funding sources and capacity to critique policy are discussed in the later section on funding.)

Responding to state / regional needs

ALNARC carries out projects that address national, state and local needs. Topics for research are identified through a consultative process. Recent RaPAL initiatives responded to government policy and curriculum initiatives at a national level. In the USA, a number of networks focused on state-wide or regional needs and are financed by their respective states to do so.

Creating a visible research culture

"People might be doing research, but we don't know about it. We don't hear them talk much about it, so we're wanting to make that more visible." (ss)

Creating a visible research culture that brings research to the foreground of the adult literacy field is one of the broad aims of ALNARC. This is also implied in RaPAL's endeavours and in many of the US networks. Some networks, such as PAARN, contribute to increased awareness about literacy research in practice by publishing monographs in print and online in order to make them widely accessible.

As one step to creating a research culture, ALNARC coordinators involve a range of interest groups in their advisory groups and organize seminars and forums where research is reported.

Network funding and coordination

Funding

All of the networks except for RaPAL receive, or have received, government funding or grants. Some have received funds from foundations. RaPAL is supported by membership fees. As well as funding research projects and training/support for researchers in practice, funding is used to hire network staff. In most of the networks, in-kind resources are also provided by sponsoring agencies.

Location

As a national network, ALNARC has centres in each Australian state, with most of these based in universities. Also national in scope, NCELTR Action Research Projects is based in a university research centre. RaPAL has informal but important links with the Literacy Research Group at Lancaster University.

Most of the USA networks are connected to state professional development centres, departments or organizations; PAARN also has a university base with Pennsylvania State University. GALPIN was managed by Literacy South, a community-based literacy organization, and the AMI study was coordinated through the New England Literacy Resource Centre at World Education and Project Zero at Harvard University.

Staff

All of the networks except RaPAL have staff in director or coordinating roles who receive some direct payment or indirect payment such as institutional support. Some networks have access to administrative support as well. Most staff are part-time, or part of a full-time position is allocated to the research in practice work. RaPAL is managed by a volunteer working group, their newsletter editor is paid a stipend, and there is a budget to pay for clerical support. Some networks also involve volunteers in mentoring roles or as workshop leaders.

Funding constraints

For some networks, government funding provides stability. As one network director suggested, "government grants tend to be easier to continue for multi-year efforts." In other cases, government funding is project based and uncertain from year to year. For example, funding for GALPIN was withdrawn during the course of a project year.

One network director noted that, when funded by the government, there may be limits to how critical one could be of government policy. In contrast, as a voluntary organization supported by membership fees, RaPAL is positioned to carry out a goal of critiquing and influencing policy.

Who is involved in research in practice networks?

Participants in the eleven networks vary from only practitioners to a range of people with interests in literacy and research. The nature of the networks' memberships tends to reflect the scope of the networks' intentions and, in some cases, the sources of funding. Networks primarily concerned with professional development tend to focus on practitioner involvement. Networks with broader aims, such as building a research culture, also have broader participation.

All of the networks do involve teachers and paid tutors or instructors; some include program coordinators and administrators. Some networks, such as PAARN and PALPIN are intended for teachers and other practitioners employed in state-funded programs, while others involve teachers from a range of programs in the state or network area (e.g., GALPIN, The AMI Study).

Membership in RaPAL is open to any individual or institution that sympathizes with the network's aims. RaPAL members include learners, teachers, managers and researchers in adult basic education from the UK and other countries. ALNARC includes a range of stakeholders in the network, including teachers.

Inviting practitioner involvement

Networks that support practitioners to conduct research use various informational and recruitment methods to encourage practitioners to

become involved. Most of these networks also ask practitioners to submit proposals for research projects, which may be reviewed by a committee or the network coordinator. Where network activities extend beyond supporting practitioners to conduct research, there are other opportunities for involvement and access to information, such as conferences, seminars, websites and publications.

Involving learners

Research in practice typically involves adult learners, usually as participants and co-learners in research studies. Some networks reported that from several hundred to over 1,000 learners have been touched in some way by research undertaken by the practitioners in the networks.

Direct learner involvement is encouraged in the RaPAL network. The annual conference is open to learners, and a small number attend. The RaPAL *Bulletin* includes articles written by learners or collaboratively by teachers and learners. However, for each network, given the wide range of literacy experience among practitioners, researchers and learners, there are challenges to organizing events and publishing resources that include and interest all members.

". . . I believe that practitioners and students themselves can do research." (ri)

Research topics and approaches

Scope

The Australia and USA networks all support practitioners to conduct research about practice through workshops, mentoring, or related approaches. The ALNARC state centres also undertake larger scale research on topics identified each year by federal government departments. RaPAL encourages practitioner and learner research through an annual conference and publications.

Topics

In some networks, practitioners engage in research about topics they choose. In others, practitioners identify research questions related to a thematic issue that has been identified by the network or other body.

Examples of themes that have been researched through the networks include:

- how to more effectively provide literacy and numeracy for groups with identified special needs (ALNARC);
- multi-literacies and life transitions (ALNARC);
- Adult Multiple Intelligences (AMI Study);
- retention (Kentucky Practitioner Inquiry Projects);
- project based learning (Project Idea);
- learning disabilities (Bridges to Practice).

Apart from identifying particular themes, some networks or research mentors encourage research related to particular topics or perspectives. Project IDEA encourages more learner-centred practices and one network director mused that she has a role in "seeding" ideas that practitioners might take up. Literacy as a social practice is a particular interest of RaPAL. This influences research undertaken by researchers and researchers in practice involved in that network.

In the USA, themes have been identified from the research projects that have been completed in some networks over time. Project reports are often categorized on websites or in resource centres by subject topics, such as retention, recruitment, numeracy or ESL. The PAARN website, for example, includes access to over 100 research reports organized by theme.

Approaches

Action research, as a method of practitioner research, is a focus of a number of networks, and is the specific direction of PAARN, the NCELTR action research projects, and Bridges to Practice. Action research is also featured in some of the ALNARC centres where the action/reflection process is seen as being well suited to practitioner research.

As well as linking research and practice, some networks also advocate that the research process is embedded in a larger social and collaborative inquiry process that includes reading, reflection and discussion with colleagues. This understanding of research is also assumed in the other networks. The networks advocate using qualitative approaches, as these are often more easily integrated into teaching.

"We define [it as practitioner inquiry] instead of teacher research, as this is more inclusive. It is inquiry in that it is other activities beyond research. We are working beyond the quantitative paradigm; i.e., discussing, socially constructing knowledge, working to become reflective about our practice, and probing rather than doing a research project." (sh)

Supporting researchers in practice

The networks use a range of approaches to support and train practitioners to conduct research. These include:

- *Workshops and institutes.* Training sessions are held for one or more days. Topics covered include identifying research questions and data collection and analysis.

- *Meetings.* Networks support practitioners to meet and discuss projects and findings, with feedback and peer support. Meetings may be face-to-face, online, and/or by phone.

- *Communication.* Listservs and phone calls are used to facilitate communication.

- *Research mentors.* University based researchers or experienced researchers in practice provide group and individual support.

- *Research buddies.* In the AMI study, researchers in practice were paired. Pairs discussed each others' projects and provided feedback.

- *Resources.* Some networks provide research handbooks and resources on a research theme. PAARN provides a handbook and the Virginia Adult Education Research Network published a handbook online.

Some researchers in practice named isolation as a challenge to doing research and some network coordinators noted that network members are geographically widespread. Either they are working on their own, or are the only ones in their context engaging in research. Although not necessarily named as a way to address isolation, some networks emphasize the importance of collaboration, discussion, and ongoing peer support. Opportunities for such interaction are provided through the support mechanisms listed above.

Sharing research findings

Networks generally require researchers in practice to write a research report. Research findings are shared and disseminated in various ways. In some cases they are shared verbally among network participants.

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Monographs or collections of reports are published and/or posted on websites. Reports are also shared through newsletters and conferences. ALNARC makes active use of the internet to publish practitioners' reports as well as a synthesis report. PAARN, PALPIN and VAERN also publish reports online and PAARN has published reports in monograph form.

Publishing research reports is seen as a means to celebrate the research, share knowledge, influence practice, and provide examples and encouragement for other researchers in practice.

". . . we have to be careful about how we help [practitioners] move their voice into the public domain . . . once a text goes out it stands alone." (ss)

Finding time to write the reports is a practical challenge for practitioners, and new researchers may not be familiar with genres for reporting research. As more research in practice reports become available, these can serve as models. Some network coordinators wondered about finding other ways to report research, such as videos. Encouraging practitioners to "dig deeper" in their research to discover deeper layers of problems, while also honoring their perspectives, is another challenge for those who mentor researchers in practice. Editing reports for a public audience, while maintaining the researcher's voice, is a related challenge.

Stipends / Funding for researchers

Networks vary in the amount of financial support they are able to provide researchers in practice. In some cases, local programs pay for release time and substitute teachers so that practitioners can attend network workshops and meetings. Travel costs to attend workshops and meetings are usually paid by networks or by programs.

In some cases, researchers receive honoraria from a network grant when they submit a report on their completed projects. Honoraria amounts range from $300 to $1200. ALNARC has provided research grants up to $5000 for practitioner-initiated projects, and teachers in the AMI study received stipends of $5000 per year. In most cases, the honoraria does not begin to cover the actual cost of time allocated to research. One network coordinator commented that research can rarely be completed solely during paid work time, particularly since "it is rare to receive . . . funding to do research that covers pay and expenses." (sk)

The nature of funding for researchers in practice points to a larger challenge, namely, the working conditions and gendered nature of adult literacy practice in general, as discussed in the next section.

Working conditions / "Women's work"

Insufficient time is the most commonly named challenge for both researchers in practice and for those who support them. Ways suggested to address time issues at the day to day level included helping researchers to plan "do-able" projects, identify timelines, integrate data collation into daily practice and find time to write when students are writing.

However, lack of time for research reflects underlying issues in the field. Many practitioners work part-time, sometimes at two jobs, and "are just trying to keep their heads above water" (th). Prospects for continuing employment are ofen uncertain.

"It is sometimes difficult to fit research into . . . what they are already doing." (sh)

The literacy field is also largely staffed by women, many of whom have child raising and other responsibilities in addition to their paid work. This leaves little time to engage in research outside of paid work time. One practitioner recalled being very excited and intellectually connected by the idea of research in practice on the one hand, but

> *"on the other hand, though, I was quite disempowered by feeling that the group that were there seemed to have far more time to do this sort of thinking . . . I had four children by this point . . . and [was] working full time. So I had little time. I had time to go in the evening and teach and organize my scheme and train my volunteers and monitor their quality and the rest of it. I didn't really have time to do reflecting."* (mhe)

A research mentor described practitioners as

> *". . . people with a huge amount of descriptive experience at their fingertips and therefore also reflective potential, who maybe have just nowhere to take it. They're going home to look after kids . . . to partners who don't want to listen. They're going home because they're paid hourly and no one is paying them to talk to anybody else [about their practice]."* (jm)

That so many practitioners engage in research despite the lack of time and financial support, suggests that researchers in practice are motivated by other benefits. According to network coordinators, these benefits include understanding practice in new ways; professional and personal development; changed or improved practice; and gaining a more critically reflective stance.

". . . And yet all of them . . . say that what they get in return is an enormous amount, that they understand their teaching in a way that they couldn't have understood just by talking about it in a group of colleagues." (ss)

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Directions for literacy research in practice in Canada

Since starting to develop this resource, research in practice networks and projects in Canada have been initiated nationally and in some provinces (see Appendix A). As we look forward to other developments, we can reflect on these new experiences in light of learnings from other networks. What might we hope to achieve through supporting research in practice? Are there desires and ways to build research cultures in Canada through existing organizations and coalitions, or to link research and practice through professional development initiatives? What are some roles for universities and field-based organizations? How can we create time and space for researchers and researchers in practice from different contexts to talk, work and learn together?

Given the regional nature of literacy provision in Canada, responses to these and other questions will vary across the regions. However, national response might better address the larger question: in supporting research in practice, what stands and approaches might be taken to address the working conditions of researchers in practice and of literacy practitioners in general? Although research in practice may not, in itself, change conditions overall, the ways in which practitioner researchers are supported may point to what could be possible in the field.

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The Research in Practice Networks

This part includes descriptions of eleven research in practice networks. The national networks (UK and Australia) are described first. The USA networks, which are state-based, are organized alphabetically by title. Some of the USA networks were based in projects that have been completed.

Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (UK)

Scope: National
Date started: 1985
Website: wwww.literacy.lancaster.ac.uk/rapal/RaPAL.htm

The Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (RaPAL) network is an independent voluntary organization based in the UK. RaPAL was formed as an outcome of a 1984 conference in Lancaster, England, that brought together people "involved in research with people involved in practice" to talk about linking research and practice. The conference surfaced a need to redefine the research and practice fields in order for this linking to occur.

RaPAL was initiated to improve communications between practitioners and researchers in the adult literacy field and to encourage democratic practices in literacy work. RaPAL also aims to provide leadership regarding adult literacy policy and provision.

Research

Within RaPAL, research is seen as being inextricably linked with practice. Linking research and practice is not only a matter of academics writing articles for practitioners or of just bringing researchers and practitioners together. Rather it requires researchers and practitioners to

Aims

RaPAL focuses on the role of literacy in adult life. The organization

- campaigns for the rights of adults to have access to the full range of literacies in their lives;

- critiques current policy and practice where it is based on simplistic notions of literacy as skill;

- supports the theories of language and learning, known as the New Literacy Studies, which emphasize the importance of social context in literacy acquisition;

- encourages collaboration and reflective research among all participants in literacy work and maintains that research and practice are inextricably linked;

- believes in democratic practices in adult literacy which can only be achieved if learning, teaching and research remain connected and stay responsive to changing social contexts and practices in society;

- recognizes that students are central to a learning democracy and their participation in the decision-making process of practice and research is essential;

- fosters collaborative participation between all educational settings including further education, higher education, adult education, work place education and prison education.

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Teachers have experiences and stories about practice and about what does or does not "work". Research enables teachers to provide evidence and authority to support their claims.

define research together. Linking research and practice can inform research, practice and policy development.

RaPAL encourages collaborative and reflective research that involves all participants and which supports democratic literacy work. Practitioner research involves systematic inquiry and reflection about practice.

Participation / Membership

Membership is open to individuals and institutions who sympathize with RaPAL's aims. RaPAL members include students, teachers, managers and researchers in adult basic education, from the UK and elsewhere.

There are challenges to organizing events and publishing resources that include and interest both teachers and students, given the wide range of literacy experiences in both groups.

RaPAL's commitment to student participation reflects beliefs in democratic practices in teaching, learning and research. The annual conference is open to students and the RaPAL *Bulletin* includes articles written by students or by teachers and students together. Workshops have been held for student-researchers and student research has been published (e.g., Mace & Moss, 1988). However, students tend to be in the minority at conferences. RaPAL has considered hosting an event for students.

Structure / Funding

RaPAL is funded by membership fees. Fees range from £5 for students and unwaged individuals to £50 for institutions.

From 1985 to 1996, RaPAL was coordinated by a voluntary collective that included two office holders and an editorial group. Given an increasing volume of work, an AGM was held in 1996 to adopt a new structure and office holders, and to set priorities for the following year.

The network is currently coordinated by a Working Group with eight positions. Working Group members are elected at the AGM, held in conjunction with an annual conference. Two sub-groups deal with organization/development and with publications. The sub-groups meet at various times and in different locations and the whole Working Group meets twice a year.

All of the Working Group positions are voluntary. The secretary/production editor is paid an honorarium and a part time person is hired to assist with administrative duties. Expenses for collective meetings are paid.

Activities / Support for researchers in practice

An annual conference and the *Bulletin* are the main sources of support and encouragement for RaPAL members. Non-members may also attend the conference and subscribe to the *Bulletin*. RaPAL has held some research workshops, including the Bradford conference for learners and practitioners in 1990.

The annual conference is held in a different location each year and is organized by people from the location. Rotating the conference location makes it accessible to people in different regions, raises awareness of RaPAL and encourages people in the region to become members. Conference proceedings include keynote addresses and workshops on topics related to research and practice.

RaPAL's priorities for 2000 were to take a more active part in national debates about literacy, to develop and publicize alternative views of literacy and to contribute to the professional development of staff in ABE and Basic Skills programs.

Sharing research

The RaPAL *Bulletin* is published three times a year. The *Bulletin*, which is themed, includes articles, book reveiws, news of events and other writing by researchers, teachers, managers and students.

RaPAL has issued position papers in response to government policies and curriculum developments and has published research reports and conference proceedings (e.g., Crowther, Hamilton and Tett, 2001).

Benefits

Some practitioners said their involvement with RaPAL had encouraged them to engage in research and to pursue graduate degrees. Some rethought their understanding of literacy and research through involvement with RaPAL.

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Sources for this section

- RaPAL *Bulletin*, 31, 1996.
- RaPAL website
- RaPAL Brochure, 2000.
- Informal interviews with Catherine McRae, Jane Mace, Mary Hamilton, Margaret Herrington, Roz Ivanic and Wendy Moss.
- Participants in a workshop, RaPAL Conference, 2000.

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Mace, J. & Moss, W. (1988). *How do people decide to join a literacy class? The report of a research study by adult literacy students.* London: The National Federation of Voluntary Literacy Schemes and the Lee Community Education Centre.

Adult Literacy and Numeracy Research Consortium (Australia)

Scope: National, with state centres
Date started: 1999; originated in 1993
Website: www.staff.vu.edu.au/alnarc

The Adult Literacy and Numeracy Research Consortium (ALNARC) is a "national collaboration between university-based centres in each state for research into adult literacy and numeracy." Initiated in 1999, ALNARC builds on the former Adult Literacy Research Network. ALRN was initiated in 1993 and was managed through Language Australia.

Research

State centres of ALNARC carry out two national projects referred to as Project One and Project Two. Project One studies are generally conducted or directed by researchers or a research team. In 1999 and 2000, Project One studies researched how including literacy and numeracy in industry Training Packages affected the quality of learning and work outcomes.

Project Two studies are mainly practitioner initiated. Practitioners are invited to apply for small grants, administered through the state centres, to investigate and document aspects of literacy and numeracy provision "on the ground." Research approaches include action research and qualitative methods. Practitioners are encouraged to select approaches that are appropriate to their questions or topics.

Aims

The Adult Literacy and Numeracy Research Consortium aims to

- develop and maintain a visible research culture in the field of adult literacy and numeracy;

- contribute to the quality of practice, training, research and policy development in relation to the provision of adult literacy and numeracy in community—and industry-based—education and training;

- carry out research projects commissioned and funded by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and Commonwealth Department of Education and Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA);

- operate in a timely and responsive manner with regard to state and national needs.

As well, the Network contributes to knowledge about literacy and numeracy as social practices, conducts research that integrates research and practice, and increases the research capacity of adult education for professional development.

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Practitioner research topics included:
- Seniors online: Online literacy and learning by senior citizens in rural centres;
- Coming through the doors: Women choosing to study;
- Mentoring special needs tutors in special needs literacy classes.

In 1999, practitioner researchers worked individually or in teams of two to three to research how literacy and numeracy can be more effectively provided for groups with identified special needs. Eighteen studies were completed. In 2000, the focus for practitioner research was multiliteracies and life transitions.

Structure / Funding

A university in each state hosts the state centre of the research network. Currently, each state centre is staffed by a director or co-directors and a coordinator. ALNARC has a national manager based at Victoria University in Melbourne. In general, the directors are university lecturers with expertise in the areas of adult literacy and numeracy. The coordinators are usually hired from the adult literacy field. The roles, responsibilities and contract arrangements of the directors and coordinators vary among the state centres.

State Centre	Location
South Australia	University of South Australia, School of Education
Queensland	Griffith University, Faculty of Education
Tasmania	University of Tasmania, Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia
New South Wales	University of Technology, Sydney, School of Adult Education
Western Australia	University of Western Australia, Graduate School of Education
Victoria	Victoria University, School of Education

ALNARC is funded by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) through the Commonwealth Department of Education and Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA). Grants are provided to state centres for administration and to support practitioner research projects. As well, the universities which house the state centres may provide in-kind assistance, such as the services of the centre's director. In the future, research grants may be distributed through a tendering process.

A National Advisory Committee oversees the completion of the national Project One studies. Committee members include the directors of the state

centres and representatives from government departments. State centres also have advisory committees. Advisory committee members contribute their knowledge and expertise and disseminate information through their organizations.

Participation

ALNARC invites participation from a range of people who are directly and indirectly involved with the adult literacy field. The state centre advisory committees include representatives from, for example, government, industry training bodies, community organizations, trade unions, the youth sector, indigenous people, and higher education, as well as from literacy programs.

State network activities such as forums and seminars include participants from a range of sectors and providers. Workshops to introduce and support practitioner research generally involve adult literacy teachers.

Activities

ALNARC activities include:

- undertaking up to two national adult literacy and numeracy research studies into areas developed in collaboration with ANTA and DETYA;
- undertaking state adult literacy and numeracy research activities in conjunction with other adult literacy and numeracy stake holders such as policy makers and practitioners;
- assisting in professional development activities regarding the applications and implications of adult literacy and numeracy research;
- preparing publications for a range of adult literacy, numeracy and other stake holder audiences.

Activities to build a visible research culture

The state centres have undertaken various activities to bring research into the foreground. The state advisory committee members are consulted about research needs and are informed about network activities. They are encouraged to share network information within their organizations.

People might be doing research, but we don't know about it, we don't hear them talk much about it, so we're wanting to make that more visible.

The state centres also organize forums or seminars that bring together a range of people with interests in adult literacy. Previous forums have included exchange of information about current work and presentations by experienced researchers followed by discussion. In some cases, the state centres link with local adult literacy councils to offer research-centred events. National forums are organized for state centres to report on ALNARC funded research projects.

Support for researchers in practice

In order to participate in ALNARC projects, practitioners need to have the support of their local organizations. The ALNARC state centres support practitioners to do research through a mentoring process. State centres have also provided workshops and seminars about research processes. These encourage practitioners to link research and practice and to do research themselves.

In one state centre, practitioner researchers are invited to submit proposals that outline their areas of interest, how they might do the research and what community support they have. Research proposals are distributed to the state centre advisory committee, which decides which proposals will be funded. Feedback is given to all who submit proposals. Mentoring is provided as practitioners engage in research and write their reports.

Remuneration

Practitioner-researchers receive research grants. These vary, but in some cases are up to $5000. Mentors receive honoraria.

Sharing research

Research reports are published and distributed. Titles and abstracts are available from the ALNARC website. As well as sharing learnings from the research, the reports provide insights and models for others. Practitioners also present their research at forums or conferences, where they meet and hear from other practitioners. Publishing reports celebrates researchers' accomplishments.

Benefits

Practitioners reported that through research they understand their practice in new ways. Examples of concrete benefits of research in practice are a program that was funded after a research project showed it to be beneficial and recommendations from an evaluation-focused study that were implemented.

Sources for this section

- ALNARC website
- Questionnaires completed by Ian Falk, Tasmania, and Jean Searle, Queensland
- Interview with Sue Shore, South Australia

. . . all of them [practitioner-researchers]say that what they get in return is an enormous amount, that they understand their teaching in a way that they couldn't have understood just by talking to a group of colleagues.

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The National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research Action Research Projects (Australia)

Scope: National
Website: www.nceltr.mq.edu.au/amep/index.html

The National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research (NCELTR) Action Research Projects are a means to involve teachers in research about their practice. The projects are coordinated and supported through the Adult Migrant Education Program Research (AMEP) Centre at Macquarie University.

The AMEP Research Centre conducts and supports research ranging from large scale empirical investigations to smaller scale qualitative studies of individual classrooms.

Research

Action research approaches were introduced in Australia in the 1980s and integrated into the Adult Migrant Education Program in order for research, theory and practice to be strongly connected. Considerable importance is attached to teacher conducted research studies that are problem focused and aimed at improving practice.

Action research is undertaken collaboratively. A central principal is that teachers should be part of participatory groups supported by the national research priorities and by their organizations.

Aims

The National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research Action Research Projects aim to

- conduct practitioner-based research;

- involve teachers in professional development, both with regard to research skills and in the content being researched;

- integrate "bottom-up" grass roots needs with "top-down" policy related needs.

The network responds to high priority practitioner research. Topics for research are always identified from national priority needs with input from all providers.

Current goals include enabling teachers to

- volunteer for professional development which will extend their research skills and fulfill their personal professional goals and interests;

- work collaboratively with academic researchers from the national research centre in a way that mutually informs research and practice.

Research topics have included:
- assessment
- distance learning
- learner groups
- literacy/numeracy
- new technology
- professional development
- program evaluation
- workplace communication

Qualitative approaches are usually recommended as they are often easier for teachers to integrate into teaching. Qualitative approaches also aim to encourage reflective inquiry and problematization of teaching, so that teachers draw insights out of their research for themselves and other teachers.

Participation

There are 22 AMEP provider organizations across Australia whose teachers could potentially be involved in research projects. Calls for practitioners to express interest for involvement in projects are sent out through these organizations.

Teachers volunteer to be part of the six-month projects in local groups of 6 - 8 participants. On average, teachers from 4 - 5 states become involved in a project, with 25 - 30 teachers participating in a given project. In 1998, 28 teachers were involved in research projects. Since 1990, about 200 have been involved.

Structure / Funding

The NCELTR is a lead partner in the AMEP Research Centre, housed in the Department of Linguistics at Macquarie University in Sydney. The Research Centre is funded by the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. The Centre provides research, professional development, publications and information services to the AMEP nationally. Action research projects are funded though annual special project funding allocated to the NCELTR.

Support for researchers in practice

The Action Research Projects are staffed by academic researchers from the NCELTR and other teacher educators working in the AMEP. Academic staff coordinate the projects, set up groups, provide advice on conducting research, facilitate research processes and discussions, and edit and publish reports. Local PD personnel assist the NCELTR coordinators.

Teachers have release time to attend workshops and they receive funding for participation, publications and workshops and academic support.

Sharing research

Research is reported through presentations at national workshops and through the *Teachers' Voices* publications.

Sources for this section

- Questionnaire completed by Anne Burns
- AMEP web site

Adult Multiple Intelligences Study (New England)

Scope: New England States
Date started: 1996 (Completed in 2001)
Website: http://pzweb.harvard.edu/ami

Initiated in 1996, the Adult Multiple Intelligences (AMI) Study involved practitioners in researching multiple intelligence (MI) theory and its implications for teaching and learning. The study was coordinated by the New England Literacy Resource Centre at World Education and Project Zero at Harvard University under the auspices of the National Center for Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL).

Research

The AMI research approach combined teacher research with a qualitative cross-site study of the teachers' experiences. Teacher research offered a structured yet relatively open-ended way for the AMI teachers to make sense of MI theory according to their own questions and teaching contexts. At the same time, they were able to share with and support each other as a team with a common foundation and goal: understanding and applying MI theory. By setting the parameters for the teacher research questions, MI theory provided a unifying theme for teacher research.

Aims

The study aimed to research how MI theory could enhance or contribute to ESOL and ABE instruction and assessment and thereby improve teaching practice. It was also hoped that the teachers involved in the study would have a rewarding and worthwhile research experience.

In the study, teacher research was defined as "systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work" (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993). The participating teacher researchers incorporated their research into the regular schedules of their programs. They were required to use at least three data collection methods, one of which had to be a monthly journal that included a description of lessons. For their other data collection methods, most AMI teachers used student surveys, interviews and observations of instruction. The study co-directors and advisors guided the teachers in the implementation of their teacher research. Drawing from the teachers' data and their own participant observations, the study co-directors conducted a cross-site study in which they looked for commonalties and divergences among the AMI teachers' experiences.

Research topics

All of the researchers identified a research question related to the theme of multiple intelligences. Questions included:

- Will awareness of their own intelligence profiles help my students become more independent learners?
- Can MI-informed instruction help the progress and attendance of LD and ADD students preparing for a GED?
- Will the use of a multiple intelligences framework support the goals and practices of popular education in an ABE classroom?

Participation

The study involved ten ESOL, literacy, ABE, GED and diploma preparation teachers from Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Vermont. These teachers were selected from 38 applicants, and came from rural, small town and urban settings. An Advisory Council of professional development specialists from the New England states was also involved.

Twelve additional practitioners from outside of New England were recruited to pilot the AMI source book that the teachers and co-directors wrote. Several hundred adult learners were involved in the study while attending the participating teachers' classes.

Structure / Funding

The AMI study was one of ten studies undertaken by the National Centre for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) and coordinated by the New England Literacy Resource Centre at World Education and Project Zero at Harvard University. The five-year study was facilitated by two part-time staff (half-time each for four years; 20% for the final year). A work study student and an administrative support person were also on staff at different points during the study's implementation.

Support for researchers in practice

Teacher researchers attended seven two-day institutes in the course of the 18 months of teacher research. Several institutes included time for a descriptive review process, which is a structured way of giving feedback to one person at a time. This process was intended to help the teachers refine some of their data collection instruments, and later in the project, to analyze a data set. The institutes also served the purpose of building community among the researchers.

The teachers also received books and articles about MI theory and ongoing support from the study's co-directors and each other. The teachers maintained regular contact through a listserv and telephone meetings, in which they shared work and provided feedback. Each teacher researcher was paired with another through a buddy system. The buddies got to know each others' research projects and served as sounding boards for each other.

Remuneration

The AMI teachers were paid a $5,000 per year stipend (prorated for the first six months of the study). They worked under contract with World Education, with specific responsibilities.

Sharing research

The teacher research reports were published as a NCSALL Occasional paper (Kallenbach and Viens, 2001). Other publications include a source book, *MI Grows Up: Multiple Intelligences in Adult Education*, co-written by the AMI teacher researchers and the study co-directors. This is a resource for adult literacy educators who are considering or have begun integrating MI theory into their practices. A report on the cross-site research report was also being published.

Benefits

Teacher researchers grew professionally and personally through their participation in the study. The draft copies of the source book *MI Grows Up*

were well received by practitioners. NCSALL sponsored three study circles on MI, facilitated by practitioners, with the source book as the primary text.

Sources and references for this section

Questionnaire completed by Silja Kallenbach

Kallenbach, S. and Viens, J. (Eds.) (2001). *Multiple intelligences in practice.Teacher research reports from the Adult Multiple Intelligences study*. (NCSALL Occasional Paper). Boston, MA: NCSALL.

Cochrane-Smith, & Lytle, S. (1993). *Inside/outside:Teacher research and knowledge*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Bridges to Practice (California)

Scope: State-wide

Online Action Research (OAR) was started to foster communication and to produce preliminary research data on populations and topics not previously researched for adults with learning disabilities.

Research

The project was based in action research approaches. Practitioners defined problems, tried possible solutions and communicated online about methods and results.

Aims

The project aimed to assist local sites to conduct research on adults with learning disabilities. The overall aim is to improve instructional practices for adults with learning disabilities.

Online communication enabled practitioners to share expertise and resources, particularly since sites were spread out geographically and varied in size and resources.

Participation

Eighteen adult education programs were involved from across California. Proposals were requested from the sites that wanted to participate.

Structure / Funding

The project was sponsored and funded by the Staff Development Institute. It was staffed through the California State Department of Education, with the involvement of staff from local sites.

Support for researchers in practice

Support included two 2-day training sessions, with interim support and online communication. Practitioners received assistance regarding topic selection, methodology and resources.

Sharing research

Research findings were shared online among network participants.

Source for this section

Questionnaire completed by John Tibbets

Georgia Adult Literacy Inquiry Network (GALPIN)

Scope: State-wide
Date started: 1995 (Discontinued in 1999)

GALPIN was initiated in 1995 as part of a three-year project. The project was based in a vision of establishing national and local networks of practitioners involved in inquiry-based staff development. Designed to work with practitioners in the rural south, GALPIN was seen as an example of a rural network. The Philadelphia Writing Project, which was also funded through the project, was an example of an urban network.

Research / Inquiry

Practitioner inquiry was seen as an alternative form of staff development. When GALPIN was introduced, staff development in Georgia mainly included single session workshops led by a topic expert. The main purpose was to provide information and strategies on a topic. Practitioners were left to apply information in their own situations.

Aims

The project aimed to

- improve the quality of adult literacy services in the United States;

- better meet learner needs and contribute to the professional growth of teachers;

- promote and strengthen inquiry based staff development opportunities for literacy practitioners.

Practitioner inquiry was seen as a potentially more powerful approach to staff development as well as an approach to program improvement. As with learner-centred and participatory models of literacy practice, inquiry-based staff development engages teachers actively in planning, taking action, and evaluating their own learning. Decision making is shared among practitioners and facilitators in inquiry projects.

Research topics

The published reports of the inquiry projects were grouped under the following headings: Understanding communities; Reconsidering learners; Exploring instruction; and Refocussing staff development.

Examples of individual topics include:

- The status of adult literacy in a south Georgia county;
- I'm not as dumb as I look;
- Learning to love reading; and
- Dropping out for the GED: Secondary educator attitudes and student experience.

Structure / Funding

GALPIN was initially funded by the UPS (United Parcel Service) Foundation. The three year project was completed in 1998. Funding to continue GALPIN was provided by the State Development Project but was withdrawn in 1999. Research and inquiry groups were discontinued. The Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education funded an inquiry network based on the GALPIN concept from 1997 until mid-1999. Due to lack of continued financial support, the network ceased to exist.

GALPIN was based at Literacy South, a community-based adult literacy organization. Staff from Literacy South and a consultant from the University of Georgia facilitated the network development and practitioner support.

Participation

Flyers and phone calls were made to practitioners to generate interest and invite application to participate in GALPIN. Literacy South selected sixteen individuals from among the applicants. Those selected were racially diverse and included men and women from volunteer-based and state programs in rural and urban areas. They had worked in the literacy field for varying lengths of time. The group included teachers, staff developers, program directors and organization leaders.

Support for researchers in practice

Practitioners took part in five 2-day retreats held at various locations throughout Georgia. They were also expected to carry out a research project during the year and to write it up.

The project facilitators had the primary responsibility for planning and co-facilitating the retreats, in consultation with a sub-group of practitioners. Each retreat focused on a theme in the inquiry process. Group members led many of the retreat activities which engaged practitioners in problematizing literacy issues, examining beliefs and assumptions, designing action statements, learning research skills and engaging in critical reflection, conversation, reading and writing.

Sharing research

Project reports were published in a single volume by Literacy South (King, 1998).

Benefits

Teachers were engaged in new ways of learning, and they changed the way they did things. Students in the participating programs took on roles of designing what they learn and practitioners learned how students can be involved in instruction. Participants and students learned that community issues are not separate from adult education and economic issues.

Sources and references for this section

Questionnaire information from Cassandra Drennon

King, J. (1998). *Research in practice. Report by the Georgia Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Network.* Durham, NC: Literacy South. (Available from Peppercorn Books and Press. PO Box 693, Snow Camp, NC 27349)

Quigley, B. A. (1998). *Action research in adult literacy practice. A descriptive study of selected projects in the United States and Australia.* Antigonish, NS: St. Francis Xavier University

Kentucky Practitioner Inquiry Projects

Scope: State-wide
Date started: 1997
Website: www.state.ky.us/agencies/wforce/daelnewsletter/
                page13.html

In 1997, an online action research project was introduced in the south central region of Kentucky to address the issue of retention. Several resources were identified and a number of instructors incorporated these resources into their learning environments. The initial work led to a summer workshop about conducting practitioner inquiry and making the results useful to practice. Research projects about retention were then carried out across the state.

> ### Aims
>
> The project researched ways to retain local populations in programs through systematic study and practice. The overarching aim was to provide best possible services to students in the state.

Research

Research started with forming questions or challenges to local programs that affected practice. Practitioners experimented with different methods and collected and analyzed data on an ongoing basis to try to find the source of the problem.

Research approaches were informed by research in practice experiences in Pennsylvania and Georgia.

Research topics

Research focussed on the theme of retention in programs. There was an interest in developing plans to assess community needs and to design programs to meet local needs. Designs reflected Kentucky's diversity. Retention in relation to Workforce Development programs was also an interest.

Participation

Ten practitioners were involved in the initial project in 1997. In 2000, seven projects were underway with a total of 40 practitioners from different areas of

Research topics iincluded:

- How can we retain students in the first month of enrollment?
- Will a more consistent, in-depth orientation improve retention?
- What differences are there between early and late drop out?

Kentucky. Most were instructors, although one project involved administrators. An estimated 1000 students were affected by the study as well.

All practitioners in Kentucky could apply to participate in the project although there was a cap on how many could be accepted. Participants agreed to take part in follow-up contacts and to disseminate information on completion of their projects.

Structure / Funding

The project was managed by a Professional Development Coordinator. This position was funded through the Kentucky Department for Adult Education and Literacy.

Support for researchers in practice

A workshop on practitioner research was offered in summer, 2000. Practitioners met quarterly as a group of "critical friends" to discuss findings and challenges and refine their questions. They also communicated through email. The professional development coordinator coached and supported participants.

Remuneration

Practitioners' expenses were paid through individual basic grants from the state Department for Adult Education and Literacy. Practitioners have professional development requirements, which can be met through participation in the research projects. There is no additional remuneration.

Sharing research

The more they research, the more excited they get about trying new things and seeing how their student population is affected.

Research findings were shared among network participants. There were plans to disseminate findings on a state level and possibly at national adult education conferences.

Sharing information was seen as a means to get other practitioners fired up about changing their practices, to professionalize the work, and to provide the best services possible to students.

Benefits

Practices improved in such areas as intake and instructional strategies. Instructors were becoming more efficient and were taking more active roles in designing programs to meet students' needs.

Source for this section

Questionnaire completed by Tracey Haddix

Pennsylvania Action Research Network

Scope: Four of six regions in the state
Date started: 1995
Website: www.learningfrompractice/org/paarn/default.htm

Pennsylvania Action Research Network (PAARN) developed from an action research course offered by Pennsylvania State University. The course was offered in six areas of Pennsylvania over a two-year period and included distance education and on-site components. Initated in 1995, PAARN is part of the Learning from Practice Project.

The state-wide Learning from Practice Project aims to provide "professional development opportunities for practitioners interested in improving teaching and learning that results in quality programs and positive learning outcomes for adult students." The project also includes PALPIN.

Research

Action research is the underlying approach for PAARN supported projects. Projects may include the following:

- Independent Study Projects. Practitioners identify a topic of program/professional need or interest and produce journal-quality papers about the research and its professional application. These projects may be completed independently or with a mentor.

Aims

PAARN aims to help ABE, GED and ESL educators develop more problem-posing/problem-solving skills, using action research as a method. It is hoped that, through the research, new knowledge will be created to inform and improve daily practice.

- Share/Compare Projects. Practitioners with an acquired area of expertise produce a journal-quality report to share information/ expertise with other program staff. The paper may be shared in media such as a newsletter, handbook, or manual.

- Program/Professional Improvement Projects. Practitioners identify an area of program/professional need and initiate a materials search to find appropriate software, videos, and study guides to address that need. A special materials' stipend is awarded to the program where the practitioner is employed, and the practitioner submits a brief report outlining the materials' use and effectiveness.

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Research topics are identified by participants. The following general topics have been used to categorize reports:

- Recruitment
- Retention
- Administration
- Student achievement and outcomes
- ESL
- Diagnosis and student placement
- Special needs
- Others

- <u>Practitioner-Inquiry-Centered Projects</u>. A group of two or more practitioners work together to explore questions concerning their own instructional/program practices in conjunction with critical readings of current theory and other programs' practices/procedures. Led by a qualified mentor/facilitator, the group works collaboratively through shared readings/research, group discussions, field trips, and other means to expand their knowledge base and improve instructional/program practice. The group submits a jointly prepared summary of inquiry topics, activities, findings, and resulting impact on individual practices.

- <u>Adoptive/Adaptable Practice Projects</u>. Practitioners identify an effective/exemplary program practice developed and/or implemented by another ABLE program and adopts/adapts this practice for use during the current program year. Practitioners submit a brief report describing the practice adopted/adapted, as well as the methods used and the effectiveness of its implementation.

Participation

Professional development is offered through Professional Development Centres (PDCs) located in six regions of Pennsylvania. PDC staff inform and recruit participants. The Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE), supports practitioners who choose to participate. Participants also need approval of their employers. There is an average of 25 participants in PAARN each year.

Structure / Funding

PAARN operates as part of the Learning from Practice Project and with funding from the state Department of Education.

The network is currently based at Pennsylvania State University and operates in four of the state's professional development regions. All staff are part-time, including a project director, two trainees, and two administrative assistants.

Support for researchers in practice

Through orientation meetings, potential practitioner researchers learn about PAARN and action research and begin to explore program-based problems and concerns. People who decide to undertake research receive a copy of the *Pennsylvania action research handbook and planner* and attend group meetings where they have support to develop their research questions. A panel reviews practitioners' research plans and provides suggestions. As practitioners undertake research, they attend further meetings to discuss progress and receive support, including support for report writing. Ongoing support is also provided through phone calls and a listserv.

Remuneration

A stipend of $300 is granted for each project completed, following a favourable review of the written project report. Reviews are done by a staff development officer or a review committee.

Mentors are involved in some projects. Mentor qualifications include:

- having a mimum of five years experience in adult education as an administrator, counselor, and/or teacher;
- being well versed in learning principles (process) as well as content areas;
- holding at least a bachelor's degree in education;
- being knowledgeable of various research paradigms;
- being competent in the area of written communication. (Experience in writing proposals, journal articles, and/or research reports is a plus.)

Sharing research

Research is published with a view to building a resource of practitioner-generated findings that can improve ABE practice. Research reports are published as monographs. Titles and abstracts are listed on the PAARN website. Full reports for 1995 - 96 have been included in ERIC.

Benefits

An evaluation of the Network demonstrated that practitioners' research led to lasting changes in practice.

Sources and reference for this section

Questionnaire completed by Gary Kuhne
Network website

Quigley, A. (1995). *Pennsylvania action research handbook and project planner*. Harrisburg, PA: Pennsylvania Department of Education.

of Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE), supports practitioners who choose to participate. Participants also need approval of their employers.

Flyers and word of mouth are used to inform people about PALPIN. Introductory sessions have also been held around the state. Seventy-eight participants are listed on the PALPIN website.

Structure / Funding

PALPIN operates as part of the Learning from Practice project, with funding from the state Department of Education. Based in Erie, PA, the Network is hosted by the Northwest Professional Development centre.

The network management team includes four paid staff, based in different areas. Some work from the area PD centres. There is also a group of leaders who may volunteer or who may be paid.

Support for researchers in practice

The network hosts a four- day intensive inquiry seminar in the fall. Inquiry is introduced, and practitioners discuss and problematize their practice and begin to identify questions and identify ways to collect data.

Practitioners read literature from the field as a catalyst to thinking about issues in their own practice. Various tasks and strategies are used to investigate a question /problem. Questions are explored through the collection of data from practice (e.g., using journals, student writings, taped conversations, program documents). Data is analyzed through a process of describing and making sense of it.

Follow-up support is provided through inquiry groups which may be online or face-to-face, in one program or across programs. Other support includes mentoring, collaborative data analysis sessions and sharing. Practitioners and facilitators communicate online and through email. One practitioner established a website and posted research data, and the facilitator provided feedback.

PALPIN hosts a mid-winter session to share project information. PALPIN also offers a five-day Leadership Institute for former inquiry network participants.

Remuneration

Practitioners who complete their projects receive a stipend of $350. The fall institute is paid for by PALPIN. Practitioners negotiate release time from their programs.

Sharing research

Practitioners' reports are bound as a booklet and shared with other practitioners in the group. Copies are also provided to the professional development coordinator and published on the PALPIN website.

Research reports are published in order to inform other practitioners of research that has been done, particularly practitioner research. It is also hoped that as practitioners see others' reports, they will feel less intimidated by research.

Benefits

Practitioners develop a new stance on their practice. They are more reflective and more likely to reflect on problems before leaping to solutions. Program relationships are more democratic.

Sources for this section

- Questionnaire completed by Sandy Harrill
- PALPIN website

Project IDEA (Texas)

Scope: State-wide
Date started: 1996

Project IDEA was initiated in 1996 to provide an alternative form of staff
professional development in Texas.

Research

Project-based learning is a foundation of Project IDEA. With Project IDEA support, teachers guide groups of learners through the design, implementation and evaluation of a project of interest to the learners. Teachers also engage in systematic inquiry related to the project by identifying questions, seeking answers, providing interpretation and applying new knowledge.

Project-based learning has helped to focus teachers on a "microcosm" that provides a context for applying action research principles. Action inquiry research, without the project based learning focus, was seen as being too academic.

Aims

Project IDEA aims to encourage teachers to

- become more reflective in their practice;

- use developmental principles in their classrooms;

- undertake action-inquiry research about topics of interest to teachers.

Long-term aims are for project participants to

- develop increased expertise;

- use new skills in their programs;

- mentor colleagues.

A current aim of Project Idea is to help practitioners conduct more learner-centred classrooms.

Research topics

A range of topics has been addressed through Project IDEA. Examples include:

- Peer tutoring program
- Program community awareness

- Curriculum—math anxiety
- Teaching strategies—learning disabilities
- Standardized student assessment
- Student retention
- Student participation in event planing
- Collection of family related writings
- Cottage industry for homeless women

Participation

Participants are teachers in ABE, ESL, ASE and GED programs funded by the Texas Education Agency. Adult education and literacy program administrators were invited to nominate teachers to participate in Project IDEA. Local program coordinators of the TEA could also nominate participants. Nominations were sent to the Project IDEA Director. Additional recruitment was done through the adult education and literacy program administrators' Internet listserv. Application packages were sent directly to a list of teachers compiled at presentations of Project IDEA participants' research. Project IDEA alumni were also encouraged to share nomination packages with colleagues.

The TEA selects participants from among those nominated from local programs. The sponsoring administrator was expected to serve as a professional resource.

A maximum of 25 participants are selected each year. Since 1998, 78 teachers have participated.

Structure / Funding

Sponsored by and based at the El Paso Community College, Project IDEA is a collaborative effort of the Adult Education Professional Development Consortium (AEPDC) and is funded through the Texas Education Agency (TEA) Division of Adult and Community Education. The AEPDC is a confederation of agencies that receive grants from the TEA and have a mandate to provide professional development for adult educators employed in TEA funded programs.

Project Idea is funded from monies from the National Literacy Act (1991) and the Adult Education Act (1998).

Support for researchers in practice

Approaches to support research have been shaped through formative and summative evaluations by practitioners, and through observations by administrators and mentors. Support for practitioner-researchers is provided through two multi-day training sessions, regional cluster meetings, a listserv and discussion of professional readings. Peer and facilitator mentoring supports practitioners and AEPDC members in working together to explore issues and provide guidance, advice, support and feedback. Pracitioners communicate through email.

Practitioners are required to complete monthly reports. These are sent to the project coordinator, who provides feedback. Books are provided to practitioners and online book discussion is facilitated.

The Project IDEA staff provide mentoring for practitioners, in conjunction with AEPDC. The Project IDEA coordinator reads all reports, discusses aspects with appropriate AEPDC mentors and recommends courses of action. Practitioners are also able to contact AEPDC members regarding questions in their field.

Remuneration

Practitioners are awarded a stipend of $1200 each for full participation in the project, which includes completing all requirements, including a capstone project and reflective report. The sponsoring program pays practitioners' travel expenses to attend training institutes and a professional conference and pays for substitute teaching during required absences.

Sharing research

A showcase of projects is held each year via TETN, with sponsoring administrators, students and interested teachers invited. Administrators introduce the practitioner-researchers and comment on the impact of their participation in Project IDEA.

A website is maintained to disseminate reflective reports, project abstracts and student-generated projects. Results are also housed in the Texas Centre for Literacy and Learning Clearinghouse for hard copy distribution.

Benefits

Practitioners have shown an added level of professionalism. Administrators reported that there was more peer mentoring and a willingness to conduct in-house peer sessions.

Sources for this section

- Questionnaire from Rebecca Davis
- Network website

Pennsylvania Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Network

Scope: State-wide, through six regions
Date started: 1995
Website: www.learningfrompractice.org/palpin/default.htm

Pennsylvania Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry (PALPIN) Network was initiated in 1995 as an extension of a Philadelphia-based Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Project. ALPIN had been initiated in 1991 to implement practitioner inquiry as a valid and viable form of professional development. PALPIN is part of the Learning from Practice Project.

The state-wide Learning from Practice Project aims to provide "professional development opportunities for practitioners interested in improving teaching and learning that results in quality programs and positive learning outcomes for adult students." The project also includes PAARN.

Research / Inquiry

PALPIN uses the term "inquiry" rather than "research" to describe the approach used. Inquiry is viewed as systematic, intentional inquiry conducted by practitioners in their workplaces (Cochrane, Smith and Lytle, 1993). Discussion, social construction of knowledge, reflection and probing are important aspects of the inquiry process. It is important for practitioners to have opportunities to get together and talk.

Participants identify research topics. Examples include:

- teaching of writing;
- ways in which students do GED writing;
- what ESL learners say about their needs;
- retention, attendance, motivation, and volunteer retention.

Aims

Participants engage in inquiry in order to investigate a question or problem that is particularly significant to their day-to-day practice. PALPIN hopes to integrate inquiry into "the fabric of professional development." To this end, the network has as a goal the integration of inquiry activities as professional development offerings in each state region.

Participation

Professional development is offered through Professional Development Centres (PDCs) located in six regions of Pennsylvania. PDC staff inform and recruit participants. The Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau

Virginia Adult Education Research Network

Scope: State-wide
Date started: 1991
Website: www.vcu.edu/aelweb/resguide/resguide1.html

The Virginia Adult Education Research Network (VAERN) was initiated in 1991 to encourage practitioner research among adult educators in Virginia. The network was initiated in response to evaluations of professional development and of adult education teachers.

Research approach

In practitioner research, groups of teachers, tutors and administrators use qualitative methods to systematically explore issues or problems arising from their own

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Aims

The network aims to promote and support individual and collaborative research programs in Virginia. The network also aims to raise awareness of research and to share writings among adult educators.

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practice, with a goal to improve practice. Practitioner research is a long term process that occurs over the course of months, within a supportive group. It continues as researchers carry out projects in their classrooms and programs. Practitioner researchers contribute their knowledge to others in the literacy education field through brief written reports.

It is important that practitioners critically reflect, find out information on a topic and improve practice. A project report is also important.

Research topics

A range of topics has been addressed through VAERN. Examples include:

- Goal setting in the New River Valley: Teachers' perceptions and strategies
- What happens when ESL students experience authentic work situations?
- Orienting adults to program options using small group research
- Designing instruction for incarcerated men
- Taking a closer look at student retention

Participation

Practitioners are invited through outreach offices, advertising at workshops, in the state newsletter, and through mail-outs to program planners, directors, and people who work with adult education staff, and by word of mouth. Practitioners submit a research proposal and are accepted on a continuous intake basis.

The network involves teachers, coordinators, administrators, GED and ABLE teachers and coordinators. About 73 practitioners have been involved since 1993; 13 were involved in 1998 and 14 in 1999.

Structure / Funding

The network is housed with the Arlington Education Program and funded under a Section 353 (professional development) federal grant.

Network staff include a coordinator/facilitator and a director, with clerical assistance. The network coordinator provides technical assistance and responds to calls, assists in the preparation of newsletters and of summer institutes. A co-facilitator is contracted for the retreats.

Support for researchers in practice

Support includes four working retreats, each at a major stage of the research process. Topics include:

- What is inquiry?
- Identifying research questions
- Data collection and research plans
- Data analysis and writing

The adult educator's guide to practitioner research is available through the network's website. The guide was developed in response to participants' requests for a handbook with "plenty of how-to". The three sections of the guide include an introduction to practitioner research, an overview of general stages in research projects, and a series of case studies. The case studies are drawn from the experiences of practitioner-researchers and illustrate the stages of research.

Support also includes monthly phone calls to participants, email, and on-site visits. Some participants form support groups. Communication is also maintained through newsletters, a professional reading review and a membership directory.

Remuneration

The network provides grant support for research to practitioners and graduate students through a proposal process.

Sharing research

Practitioner-researchers present their work at conferences, workshops and summer institutes. Reports are published in an annual Year in Review, on the network's publication website.

Benefits

Practitioners advanced in their careers. They became more reflective and more confident.

Sources for this section

Questionnaire completed by Ronna Spacone

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Appendix A Recent developments in literacy research in practice in Canada (1996 - 2001)

In February 1996, the National Literacy Secretariat, Ottawa, hosted a policy conversation on literacy research.The participants identified a need to recognize, link, support and advance literacy research and practice in Canada. Following the policy conversation, Norton and Laberge, who had participated in it, surveyed six consultants about practitioner research in Canada. The consultation identified both an interest in research in practice and a number of potential challenges to practitioners engaging in research, including practitioners' need for support and resources to do research.

The survey led to an October 1997 research in practice seminar in Edmonton. Eighteen literacy researchers, practitioners and consultants met to discuss the potential and possible future applications of literacy research in practice in Canada. Literacy practitioner research networks and projects that had been discussed or attempted in parts of Canada were reviewed, as were some of the established networks in Australia, the UK and the USA. The seminar heightened interest in developing organized approaches to supporting or sustaining research in practice initiatives.

In February 1998, the National Literacy Secretariat produced *Enhancing literacy research in Canada*, which highlighted the need for research capacity building in Canada. This report outlined a framework for supporting research in literacy and included practitioner research as one important direction for literacy research in Canada. By this time, organized literacy research in practice efforts had been introduced in Alberta and British Columbia.

In 1998, a descriptive survey of literacy action research projects in Australia and the United States was published by Quigley. It formed the basis for contact with many of the Australia and US networks included in this resource.

In 1997, The Learning Centre, Edmonton, in partnership with the University of Alberta Faculty of Education, initiated an NLS funded practitioner research project that explored participatory approaches in literacy education. Building on this project, a Research in Practice in Adult Literacy (RiPAL) Network was initiated in 2000 by the Literacy Coordinators of Alberta, the Learning Centre, and the U of A Centre for Research on Literacy. Both projects used web-based and internet communication to help practitioners read,

apply and conduct research about practice. The later project incorporated approaches described in a framework for research in practice developed by Horsman and Norton (1999).

In 1998, a course on action research was offered as part of Literacy BC's summer institute. Twenty-seven practitioners attended from BC, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario and the Territories. This was followed in the fall by a workshop on practitioner research, sponsored by the BC Ministry of Advanced Education. A research conference, included in Literacy BC's online conference system, is accessible to conference subscribers in BC and the western provinces and territories.

In 2000, a Research Circles project was initiated in BC out of Simon Fraser University, with Literacy BC involvement. Its aim was to support and build the capacity for literacy practitioner research. This project was discontinued in 2001. At the time of writing, a collaborative research in practice project, initiated in 2001, involves five practitioners who are researching how adults with little formal education learn. A university-based consultant is providing research workshops and support for the research team.

Elsewhere in Canada, the Ontario Field Research Group of literacy practitioners and researchers, although disbanded on a formal level, continued to function in an informal manner. The Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education Regional conference held in Halifax in March 1998, was dedicated to practitioner action research. A national project, based at the University of Ottawa, involved 10 practitioners in doing action research about workplace literacy. Reports about each project are included in the project report (Taylor, 2002), which also includes a guide to doing action research.

In Edmonton, summer 2001, a Gathering about literacy research in practice attracted sixty people from various research and practice contexts across Canada, along with some participants from the UK, Australia and the USA. Researchers in practice facilitated workshops and inquiry groups about their research and engaged in discussion about research in practice. A consultation about establishing a literacy research journal was held following the Gathering; other journal consultations were planned for future dates. By December 2001, another gathering was being planned for 2002, in conjunction with a literacy conference in BC. It was hoped that researchers in practice would present at the conference as well as meet as a group to plan ways to build the literacy research in practice movement in Canada.

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