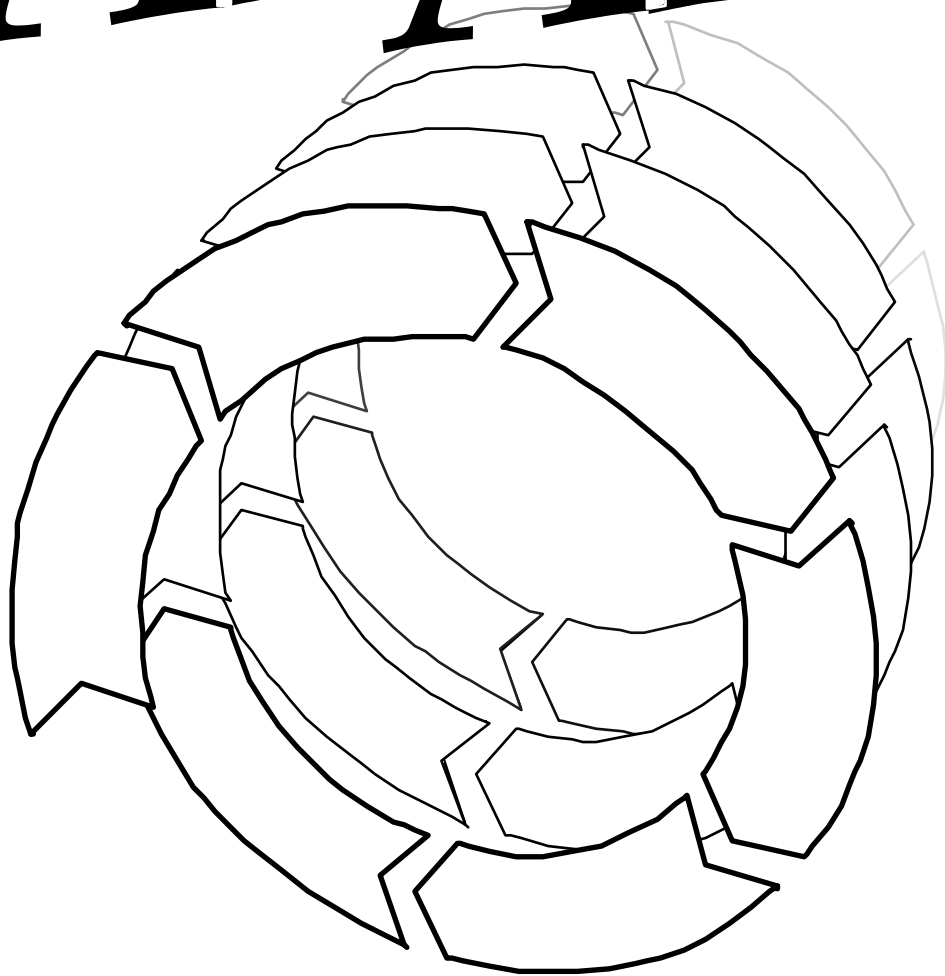


ALAR



Action learning action research journal
Volume 6 No. 2 October 2001

ALARPM is a strategic network of people interested or involved in using action learning or action research to generate collaborative learning, research and action to transform workplaces, schools, colleges, universities, communities, voluntary organisations, governments and businesses.

ALARPM's vision is that action learning and action research will be widely used and publicly shared by individuals and groups creating local and global change for the achievement of a more equitable, just, joyful, productive and sustainable society.

ALAR Journal

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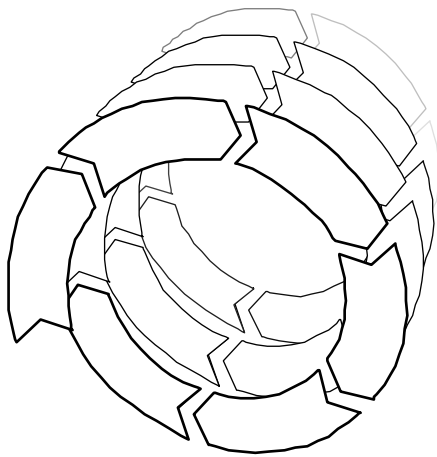
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Editorial

Welcome to the eleventh issue of the ALAR Journal. In this issue we bring you reflections from the South African women who participated in the Australian – South African Links project *Leadership Development of Academic Women Through Action Learning and Action Research*.

Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt, Adjunct Professor in the Faculty of Education, Griffith University, initiated this innovative and far-reaching project with funding through the Australian Government AusAID program. Professor Sandra Speedy, Director of the Graduate College of Management, and Angela Delves, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Enterprise & International), Southern Cross University, headed a team of leading women academics from Griffith University, The University of Queensland, Queensland Institute of Technology, and myself, who acted as mentors to the South African women throughout the program.

While you are reading through these papers we ask you reflect on the fact that there are eleven languages spoken in South Africa. English, for largely political reasons, has become the official language of tuition, yet for the majority of people in South Africa, English is at best their second language. This presents significant difficulties across all sectors of education, but in the tertiary sector, where students and teachers are required to communicate complex theoretical and conceptual understandings, it becomes even more problematic. Every time a concept or an idea is interpreted from one language to another it loses something in the translation. Writing in a second language is a constant struggle for the women academics in this program.

In “Profiles” we present brief bio-notes of the Australian mentors who gave so generously of their time to be involved in the project. The mentors considered it a privilege to be involved in such a project.

Leadership development of academic women through action learning and action research - An AusAID South African Links Project

Introduction

The Australian – South African Links project aimed to develop the leadership skills of academic women in six Technikons throughout South Africa. Training and support was given to enable women in staff development and various academic discipline areas to conduct collaborative Action Learning and Action Research projects within and across their institutions. The objectives of the project were achieved by first establishing the participants' expectations and needs, and then planning, designing, conducting and evaluating four phases of the project: (a) a residential start-up workshop in South Africa was followed by the development of learning sets in their own institutions and the commencement of their project work; (b) a residential leadership workshop was conducted in Australia; (c) action learning projects undertaken by the participants were assisted by their mentors and completed over the remaining period of the project; and (d) a concluding workshop in South Africa incorporated a publicly attended Presentation Day.

The program was highly successful in terms of the participants' personal and professional development. The observable level of growth in the participants was quite astounding and very gratifying. The individual projects, conducted by the participants and their learning sets, also provided evidence of significant organisational development within their own institutions. Articles produced by the participants will be published in a monograph produced by Southern Cross University Press or submitted to refereed Journals in the relevant discipline areas.

An additional benefit from the program has been the parallel development of a joint Masters program in International Sports Management between Southern Cross University and Technikon North Gauteng. The links formed between SCU and TNG have facilitated the sharing of expertise between SCU and TNG and have made possible the most up to date training in the field of sports management to South African participants in-country. A member of the academic staff from TNG will study for the Masters in Sport Management at SCU during 2002. Subsequently that staff member will be able to offer the course to South African participants by mixed mode course delivery. It is anticipated that in the next phase of the course development, TNG will provide units with an African emphasis for the course.

Another extremely gratifying outcome was the encouragement provided by the Rector of TNG Professor GSK Lenyai and his offer to present their research to all staff at TNG, and to take it on a 'roadshow' to other Technikons, so as to profile the participants and their research projects. The Director of Research, Professor PDF Kok, was so impressed with the quality of the research presentations that he indicated his intention to provide additional funding to further develop some of these areas of research.

The following reflection papers illustrate the diversity in the projects undertaken and provide some insight into the personal and professional development achieved by the

South African women academics involved in this very worthwhile project.

Using action learning to improve classroom practice: The integration of academic skills

and Business Law 1

Mumthaz Banoobhai

Academic Development Practitioner

Technikon Northern Gauteng

The following reflections were made during and after an action research project that involved making a change in my classroom. The set members included learners from the Faculty of Commerce. The aim of the project was to improve teaching and learning by integrating study skills with subject specific content so that learners could find learning relevant and meaningful. This involved demonstrating a study skill and then applying the skill to subject knowledge.

The action research/learning project has assisted in achieving many institutional goals, vision and mission statements. The project provided opportunities for research capacity building, as well as to monitor the current academic support program and initiate vital change that could lead to increased student retention.

Although the Technikons' strategic plans are very noble, commitment was limited, making some phases of the project difficult to implement. The organisation support was limited with regards to finance, workload of participants, resources and time for participants to fully engage in the project tasks.

Working in teams or "sets" is one of action research principles and as a result it provided the opportunity of sharing experiences, ideas, weaknesses, strengths and difficulties. Working in teams has helped me to develop a sense of openness, security, academic leadership skills and trust in the group. Initially, individuals were "afraid" of research, and felt threatened by the new approach and the idea of working so closely with "strangers". The projects

had a positive effect in helping us to develop skills in dealing with racial and cultural differences and to be sensitive to diversity.

This experience has taught me about research, teamwork and most importantly about myself. I have become more confident in my abilities to conduct research, interact with colleagues, take on leadership roles and present at international conferences. I have also learned a lot about the students that I interact with and how to make my teaching more fulfilling. It has allowed me the opportunity to look beyond the surface and to reflect and initiate change at a grass root level.

This experience has left me feeling like the sky is the limit and that individual teachers can (by using action research and action learning), make a significant difference in the lives of the learners, the organisations they represent and in themselves.

Our next issue of the ALAR Journal, will include:

- A report on WC5&9 by Orlando Fals Borda
- Reflections and evaluations of WC5&9
- Profiles and contact details for your new ALARPM Management Committee
- News about ALARPM activities
- Networking in New Zealand
- New book reviews and more ...

Reconnaissance of the context to

formulate a new vision
Cama Brandt
Research Coordinator
Technikon Southern Africa

Our new century is referred to as the “Age of Ideas”, or the “Age of Information”, or the “Age of Knowledge”. Against this context my project was to introduce action learning and action research methodology in my higher learning institution where these strategies were not in existence. I believe that action learning and research are appropriate strategies to value and reward idea-generators at all levels who can deliver ‘edgy’ ideas leading to change and improvement of the quality of life for all.

I started my new journey as an action learner and researcher and as a research co-ordinator at the newly established Institute for Staff Development at Technikon SA. I work for a career-focused distance education higher learning institution servicing some 70 000 students with about 170 full-time and over 2000 part-time academic staff members. To spread the action research gospel, I facilitated a continuum of training, mentoring and initiating action research projects among distance education practitioners.

My journey as an academic leader in staff development led me gradually into an iterative spiral from a technical, to a practical to an emancipatory interest in action learning and research.

The first leg of my journey: Action research as a technician approach

In my first staff development action research project we developed a generic tutor training manual through a series of workshops and feedback sessions with tutor managers. When only a few questionnaires were received back, we took

on the role of 'outside' experts and produced the manual based on the job descriptions of tutors. What I as an academic leader learnt from this project was useful when I got the brief to act as an interim Project Manager to develop an on-line postgraduate course for distance education practitioners a year later. Here I ensured to include and to empower members of the target group as indispensable co-researchers in the action research set.

The second leg of my journey: Action research as a practical approach

Over the two years I conducted regular workshops for those staff members interested in action research. For further interested staff members I did act as a mentor, a sounding board or as an action set member to assist distance education practitioners to modify their practice as they go along in a supportive collaborative environment. For example, in:

- Law (people's values versus laws);
- Applied Communication (alternative assessment);
- Business Management (reflective communities of social entrepreneurs in rural areas);
- Horticulture (curriculum design and delivery with professional bodies);
- Youth Work (service learning); and
- Police Practice (coursework Masters' research portfolios);
- Engineering (community service: teaching the unemployed).

The third leg of my journey: Action research as an emancipatory approach

During my journey I was able to encourage staff members to engage in a corporate research projects on improving the pass-rate of students at our institution, where various

unit/program groups set up their own case study research to contribute that the vision. Currently I am also part of the core team of peers of a capacity-building and evaluation project of 100 courses (called instructional offerings) at our Technikon. We will do two rounds of evaluation. First, we complete a comprehensive written questionnaire and thereafter we conduct in-depth interviews with stakeholders (e.g. past & current students, tutors, and employers). Lastly we will write a report with recommendations on future teaching and learning designs.

The main lessons emerging

Through this Australia - South Africa Links project I improved my academic leadership in action learning and action research. I observed that distance education practitioners engaged in action learning and action research seem to be more inclined to:

- develop a more balanced view of learning. Learning is besides memorising and imitating others, also viewed as a personal and social perspective transformation, thus students' learning outputs are broadened;
- present more papers and publish more articles, thus improving their research outputs of themselves and their organisation;
- maintain a more professional reflective and accountable everyday practice by integrating research into teaching and learning.

The development of needs-based skills programs for academics at Tecknikon Northern Gauteng

Ansu Erasmus

HOD, Teaching and Learning Development
Tecknikon Northern Gauteng

The Australia/South Africa institutional links project: "Leadership development of academic women through action learning and action research" is a collaborative project between Southern Cross University and Technikon Northern Gauteng. The project involves individual action research by eighteen women from six technikons in South Africa and mentoring by ten Australian women leaders.

My reflections are based on my role as project coordinator in South Africa. During the project I learnt the following:

- The importance of clarifying roles and responsibilities of every participant, and specifically my own as coordinator, to avoid unrealistic expectations that participants may have of my role.
- Our cost estimation (in terms of time spent on the project) was totally unrealistic. The increase in administrative tasks for myself and my administrative assistant was unexpected.
- The internal environment at Technikon Northern Gauteng (TNG) is not always conducive for trouble-free project management. It is sometimes very difficult to ignore the politics involved and to focus on the outcomes of the project.
- Effective communication in a project is crucial. My communication with the participants and the Australian coordinator was not always immediate or adequate. Some participants at the non-TNG technikons were very

difficult to contact (e-mail and fax out of order), and the different time zones between SA and Australia were an obstacle when deadlines became an issue (progress report etc.). However, I learnt about the importance of effective monthly meetings and managing barriers to communication.

- People management: I gained some understanding of building positive relationships between participants, managing people diversity, motivating people to achieve project outcomes, team leadership, building and leading the project team towards success, managing conflict and stress in the project (e.g. racial issues).
- Recruitment and selection of participants for the project: overcoming difficulties at TNG with the selection of participants, and in the non-TNG technikons. I learnt that in spite of using the correct channels of communication, hidden agendas should not be underestimated.
- Contractual agreement between TNG and SCU: the importance of such an agreement in legitimising and directing the project activities over the project period.
- I learnt that meticulous cost accounting is crucial.
- I learnt about the inflexibility of IDP reporting methods and that some things must just be accepted in order to make progress.
- The Mabalingwe workshop and Australia visit: the behaviour and attitude of some participants surprised and disappointed me, namely, the impact of cultural differences on the group cohesion, the lack of commitment of some participants to the project, the attitude that the project coordinators must plan and arrange everything, the unhappiness expressed by non-TNG participants about the Australia visit.

- I have increased my understanding of project planning and control to ensure completion on time, within budget, while meeting specifications, objectives and expectations.
- I learnt from the Australian coordinators how to write a professional progress report to the IDP.

In summary, I learnt mostly about project management in general, including interpersonal skills and time management skills.

The development of outcomes-based curricula at the Vaal Triangle Technikon

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HOD, Curriculum Development

Technikon Vaal Triangle

Currently the South African higher education system and its institutions are undergoing a transformation process in order to develop a single co-ordinated system, premised on an outcomes-based definition of higher education as set out in the Higher Education Act. The curriculum, defined as the complete learning environment and all learning outcomes (Defrost, s.a.; Welch, 1998; Williams, 1994), puts the definition of higher education into practice. At the end of 1999, I was tasked with the challenge to develop curricula at the Vaal Triangle Technikon accordingly. This paper reflects on organisational, set and personal learning outcomes achieved during an Action Research project to develop case studies of different aspects of different curricula in various departments at the Technikon. These case studies were initiated as part of the Australia / South Africa Links Project:

Leadership Development for Academic Women through an Action Learning and Research Programme at the beginning of 2000.

Organisational Learning Outcomes

Innovation occurred when the Technikon ran Action Research (AR) case studies as pilot projects to inform the national transformation process in higher education. The utilisation of resources and the quality of teaching and learning and research improved.

The sets developed synergy by exchanging information, improving their understanding of the transformation process in higher education, their competence, confidence and resourcefulness, awareness and utilisation of resources, and by reducing the gap between “espoused values” and “values-in-use”. New linkages across and beyond the organisation were formed.

Case studies were conducted voluntarily and set members invested time and energy beyond organisational expectations. They set examples of good practice and became agents of change through their own learning. As the change process continues, these people act like yeast in the organisational cake.

Set Learning Outcomes

The learning outcomes for the different sets differ considerably. Research was dovetailed with learning and teaching and stimulated by demystifying research through exposure to AR, and by spin-offs of the original project. In the process sets learned how to reference other authors’ work, write research proposals, abstracts and papers, and how to conduct workshops. Through AR we extended the research process into the past, for example through a reflective diary.

Sets contributed to the curriculum development process. Good practice was embedded through the methodology of AR, which involves strategic planning, regular meetings, group work and continually disseminating findings. Teaching became more focused and structured and we enhanced our capacity for change. Contract teachers established new relationships with the Technikon and improved their capacity to collaborate. By co-operating with people in industry, we extended our group dynamic learning outcomes. Learners were guided to improve their marketability and the way they document their projects, they boosted their confidence in presenting projects and cultivated life long learning processes.

Administration and service departments learned how to do research and about current developments in higher education – traditionally the domain of academic staff. We also learned about one another's functions and processes at the Technikon.

Personal Learning Outcomes

I learned theoretically, practically and existentially more about higher education, specifically outcomes-based education. Participating in the discourse in higher education, I extended my comfort zone, experienced a sense of empowerment and enhanced my self-confidence.

The success of the project depended on the quality of the relationship between the sets and me as facilitator. Although I made mistakes, I came to appreciate different skills, perspectives and approaches more and to know more people at a deeper level, I learned how to play politics, lead participatively, facilitate critical dialogue among empowered participants and manage time and energy more effectively, my interpersonal skills improved and I understand the ramifications of my own actions better.

I became more aware of my own motives and value systems. However, I wonder which motives and values are still hidden and whether all of them are compatible with one another. I am unsure whether I have the personality required to be a successful action researcher.

My first baby was born during this research project which could be regarded as an AR project in its own right. I learned how to cope with work – a lot of travelling, attending conferences and relatively long working hours – and family. I realised how under prepared my community is for nursing mothers who want to pursue a professional career, but also learned to appreciate my available support system. I learned to be grateful for many mercies – especially the one I call Jeanne.

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*communities, voluntary organisations,
governments and businesses.*

The enhancement of a research culture at Technikon Pretoria using action research

Tessie Herbst

Training and Development Facilitator

Technikon Pretoria

South African higher education and training institutions face many new challenges, one being that higher education institutions must produce research that will build our economy and make us significant players on the global stage. To address this challenge of research and development (R&D) an action research team undertook a project to identify the important needs and problems, related to the enhancement of the current research culture. This paper only presents some of the highlights of my reflections during the project.

Personal learning outcomes

At the start-up workshop I was introduced to the concept of action learning and research for the first time. The introduction to action research on the first day, hearing this term again and again, left me distraught as to what action research was and what that has got to do with leadership development. After a week hearing this term again and again my eyes opened to the various forms of action research as well as to its founding theorists such as Reg Revans. The presentations during that week solidified my understanding of what the term meant and the role action research would play in the leadership development program.

Back at the Technikon I had to start with my own action research project. Action research was also a new concept to most the staff at the Technikon and it was a case of “in the land of the blind, the one-eyed woman is king!” I found starting with my project, trying to create awareness about

action research among staff and inviting them to become involved, was daunting but worthwhile. Two months ago I was in search of getting an understanding of the concept and now I was capable of helping others to get to know the concept. Presenting a workshop on action learning and action research to my set was rewarding and from the questions they posed to me, of which I sometimes didn't have the answers myself, I realised that I was at the start of my learning curve about action research. It was there that I fully realised what Reg Revans meant when he said that cleverness is not enough, to solve problems you need wisdom as well.

During the final presentation day at the concluding workshop all the remaining pieces of the puzzle became clear and I felt a sense of contentment as well as relief. The empowerment which has taken place since the start of the project could be observed in the way the participants presented their research projects.

Conclusion

Taking everything into account I would definitely say that my involvement in this program was certainly advantageous to my own development as a leader as well as a researcher. In closing, this learning experience had fortified in my mind that learning is certainly enhanced in the collaborative atmosphere of action learning and action research and that we are all in one form or another, leaders and followers alike!

An investigation of social literacy practices of learners at Technikon Witwatersrand (TWR) using action research

Eleanor Kunene

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Technikon Witwatersrand

The article is about the reflections of an action research set of five women academics from Technikon Witwatersrand (TWR), who investigated the social literacy practices of learners at their institution.

The aim of the study was to explore the social literacy practices of learners at TWR, by focusing on the learning resources which the learners bring to the learning situation, in order to facilitate their integration into higher education system. A qualitative action research study was conducted using focus group interviews as a tool for data collection. The study group was identified as those learners who are first time entrants into higher education, are less than 21 years of age, have just left high school and have no previous full-time work experience.

Personal learning experiences

The participants found the project enriching and challenging. It enriched their knowledge and understanding of action learning and action research, as well as challenging them to analyse their institution and what its main business is. There were also moments of frustration and disappointment. Frustration when it came to the load of work involved in the project, in addition to the academic work and personal studies of the set members. Upon reflecting on this, the members decided to spread the reading material available and whatever work needed to be done among them, and send their inputs electronically to the coordinator, thus

making it easier to collate and circulate the draft for their inputs and corrections before the set meeting and final approval at the set meeting. The other strategy utilised was to set meeting dates well in advance. These strategies worked well. Disappointment expressed was with the project planners who made financial provision for one Technikon only, when actually from the onset (according to the proposal) the project was to be a collaboration of several institutions. The set members utilised whatever resources were at their disposal, and even went to the extent of purchasing recording tapes and refreshments for the focus group interviews from their personal funds just to see the project going. Having learnt from this experience, they suggested that in future, when a similar collaborative project is planned, or when they prepare a proposal for a similar project, they will ensure that financial provision should be requested and provided for all participating institutions. They would also request some 'seed money' for the projects that the set members have to initiate in their respective institutions, so that project leaders have some funds to 'kickstart' their projects. The members also learnt the importance of preparing a proposal with a budget early in the project and getting these approved.

Team learning experiences

The project has afforded the members an opportunity to make new friends, appreciate the diversity in people and interact with their colleagues. This has also made members to appreciate their colleagues and their inputs more. *"You suddenly become aware of who your colleagues are, their expertise and interests, as well as how they can compliment the resources that you have available to you as an individual."*

As one member put it: *"It increased my sense of being part of the TWR community and expanded my network of colleagues."*

Organisational learning experiences

The set members saw action research as a vehicle for organisational development as well as an empowering process for the staff in those organisations. This is echoed by the words of set members who said:

"I realise that action research is an avenue that may be pursued by ordinary people in everyday jobs. What is most interesting about the process is its relevance to problems that exist in and around the workplace. One needs only to identify a real problem in the organisation and then carry out your action research to obtain results. Also one need not work alone, therefore one does not feel lost or afraid. With the support of colleagues one is not afraid to tackle the problem."

"I endorse action research as an important vehicle for academic development. Action research convinced me of the need for regular reflection with others".

"Taking into consideration that in action research one is involved out of own interest in participating in the project, I would certainly recommend action learning and research as a method to be used by our organisation to further its aim as a learning organisation".

The learners also benefited from participating in the focus group interviews. Most students during the interviews, became aware that the problems that they had experienced when they first came to tertiary learning at TWR were problems that other students had also experienced. This helped them to see their problems in perspective and to experience a sense of belonging. Action research is therefore a problem solving method, whereby the solutions to problems are put into action.

In reflection I think we have all benefited from this action research: the set members of women academics and the students. The ALAR set members have learned to work together as a group, although they came from different

disciplines. Cross-pollination of ideas took place. Students have commented that they were glad to voice their opinions and that they have discovered they were not alone with their problems. They developed a group sense.

Reflection article prepared by Eleanor Kunene, with contributions from the set members and colleagues Sheryl Buckley, Marie Dreyer, Linde McLaren and Roashaine Pather.

Improving the pass rate in Mathematics1

Ina Louw

Lecturer, Physical Sciences
Technikon Northern Gauteng

The thematic concern of our group was: “Improving the pass rate in Mathematics1 at Technikon Northern Gauteng (TNG).” The members of the group were all members of the department and involved in teaching Mathematics to the first years. We introduced a tutor system in Mathematics for the first year students and went through two action research cycles.

Personal learnings

I wanted to achieve concrete results and actual benefits for my students. I am pleased to say that the project improved the pass rate and students benefited from this teaching method.

The two training opportunities we had (at Mabalingwe and in Australia) through this program enhanced my professional knowledge and improved my leadership skills. For example:

- I learned a lot by doing the project and reflecting with supportive colleagues.
- I realised that I have to read more journals in my field and by doing that, I got in touch with an educator/researcher at Cape University. She really helped me a lot and was so cooperative and supportive. I learned a lot from the project she did at her institution.
- I learned to develop a questionnaire. I am not sure whether it is the best possible one, but at least I tried.
- I had to use the Internet and through Sylvia Edwards I got the “know how” and the confidence to play around on the Net.
- I came to realise that research is not as impossible as I thought especially when it is Action Research. The collaborative nature of it suits me.

The Team

Synergy

The team learned the willingness to share knowledge, information and skills in order to solve the problem. We achieved a synergy and that means the outcomes were more than the sum of its parts.

Team spirit

The team members were all eager to solve the problem and as such willing to participate in the project. They were willing to cooperate and collaborate in order to make the project a success.

Permeability

Permeability means a readiness to be open to self-criticism and critique from others, to admit one’s ignorance or failure, to be honest to others and oneself. This was very hard in the

beginning, but some members eventually succeed in it and that was a key factor in our progress.

Diversity of skills

We soon realised that each one of us has special skills and interests. We distributed tasks in such a way that everyone got to do what she is really good at.

Symmetrical communication

This means that the members recognised each other as equal team members and shared the responsibilities for the outcome of the project. They also develop mutual respect for individual needs and differences.

Consensus decision making

The group quickly discovered that they must focus on the project and that made it easier to reach decisions and consensus.

Commitment to improve

The members all shared a passion to improve our exam results in Mathematics¹ and were therefore very committed in the project. They also became committed in improving their reflective practices and teaching methodologies.

Reflective practices

The group was never before involved in any reflective practices and they had to be introduced slowly into the keeping of a reflective diary. It proved so useful that it soon formed an integral part of our daily lives.

The organisation and project plan

The organisation involved in this project is Technikon Northern Gauteng (TNG).

Identification and analysis

It is important to TNG that the problem was identified and analysed in order to solve it. If TNG wants to attract students it must be able to prove a good pass rate in a crucial subject like Mathematics.

Designing a strategy

It is also to the benefit of TNG that there must be a strategy in place in order to solve the problem. This is a very responsible and educationally correct way to solve the problem. We did not only treat the symptoms, but tackled the problem at its roots.

Implementing and testing the strategy

The planning only of something wonderful cannot solve problems. The plan needs to be implemented and ultimately tested. We did exactly that. We implemented the plan over two semesters and have the statistics to back our outcomes.

Evaluation of the effectiveness

We have designed a questionnaire whereby we wish to evaluate the effectiveness of the project amongst participating students. That will only be completed in August. It is important for TNG to have the project evaluated.

Conclusions and/or newly identified problems

TNG will definitely benefit from the conclusions we have drawn about the project. We did that, but we also discovered new problems. Most of these problems are administrative in nature and will be taken into account in future cycles.

Report of findings to all stakeholders

It is definitely in the interest of TNG to get this project published in the form of an article. It will show that TNG is serious about quality education and apply diverse methodology to arrive at the desired result.

**The improvement of learning skills for
students in the Faculty of Health
and Social Sciences**
Mapheto Makgalemele
Lecturer, Education Management Studies
Tecknikon Northern Gauteng

The Technikon Northern Gauteng has four faculties. Health and Social Sciences is one of the faculties and has diverse programmes. Within this faculty there is a department of education. In this department there are students doing the three year diploma, B Tech and Masters and Doctoral studies. The performance of these students has been declining. That is, the department is experiencing a low pass rate.

Of concern are the lower classes. As such the National Diploma Level 2 students were singled out. Their performance level was checked on the computer (ITS). The tendency was towards a continuous low pass rate. The researcher then decided to embark on Action Learning and Action Research to remedy the situation.

A survey was done with both the students and lecturers to identify the roof cause of the problem. Language emerged as the main problem. Thus action research methods were developed along side the eradication of the language proficiency problem.

A set group of six was formed comprising of 2 students, 3 lecturers and the team leader. The Level 2 students were to meet once a week in their teaching practice class. Language proficiency was taught such that, it formed an integral part of their mainstream curriculum.

Six cognitive concepts were used in developing the students. These are concepts used in teaching and assessing students. Teaching in class was based on these concepts and during the teaching practice classes students were assessed based on these concepts. Thus the action research cycle was followed.

Quick wins

Students cooperated and they filled questionnaires and responded positively to the survey questions. The six cognitive concepts were explained in an African language (1st language) and in English (2nd language). It was established that there are concepts following a low order of thinking e.g. name, state, give and those on the high order like explain, discuss and evaluate.

The low order concepts had an African language equivalent whilst those of high order did not. Exercises were used to improve the students language proficiency.

To support my study with scientific testing the Directorate Research made available to me research funds. The researcher collaborated with the department of language proficiency to test the level 2 students and their results have now to be analysed. Envisaged is coming up with the remedial programme that would assist students Technikon wide in Language Proficiency (English). If enough funds are available then incoming 2001 students (level 1) for the whole technikon will be tested.

Areas with potential for development

Keeping the team together was difficult. Meetings could not be held as scheduled and organising workshops was

difficult. Working with a team requires skill and knowledge of rules and policies. Questionnaires and surveys needed a lot of time for compilation and administering them took its toll. However these were turned into learning areas and a wealth of experience was acquired.

Conclusion

The Action research project has opened doors for the researcher. Improvement of classroom conditions of learning is now easy, doing research as an institutional project and for my studies is enriching. I will keep contact with my mentor for future collaboration.

The relationship between language proficiency and the use of examples in dictionaries

Lorna Mphahlele

Lecturer, Languages Department
Technikon Northern Gauteng

The concept of research was a nightmare, but since I underwent training in Mabalingwe about a new approach or methodology on research i.e. Action Learning and Action Research, I gained confidence. When comparing the old method of research and this approach I found out that this AL/AR approach is user friendly and concrete. It also helped me in sharing ideas with my colleagues, I realised that information seeking is not only in written materials but also through interviews, workshops, group discussions, conferences, symposiums etc. as I was forced to do it with my team. It has made me move from the back seat as far as facilitation is concerned. The project made me realise that leadership is not far fetched; it is something that is within you, especially if you are married with children. If your family, as a small unit, is successful then you have achieved. There is this saying in South Africa that behind every

successful man there is a woman, when you educate a man you educate one person, but when you educate a woman, you educate a nation. Having achieved in a small unit I feel I can be a successful leader out there.

I am at a moment pursuing my PhD although the supervisor I am presently under does not approve of the AL/AR approach; the confidence I acquired through this project will help me achieve this goal.

I realised the workload involved in this project after accepting the nomination. It was frustrating because it came at a time of my redeployment where I was expected to teach a new subject in communication. Positiveness helped me in rolling these balls. Marilyn provided the motivation after she accommodated us in her home and I realised that she does everything on her own without a helper. This made me revisit my way of doing things. I stopped complaining in as far as workload is concerned. In one pamphlet that I read about Winners vs Losers there is this saying that: The Winner says it may be difficult but its possible and The Loser says it may be possible but its too difficult. My role model Marilyn McMeniman made me choose The Winner.

Team Learning Experiences

Problems encountered

We could not meet regularly as agreed because; my group consisted of researchers who are always busy with their personal researches, their academic work and successfully looking after their families.

The strong points

- The action learning group is directly involved with language teaching, we shared the same sentiments. We have the same experience in as far as language problems are concerned.

- They contributed positively towards the chosen subject (topic) and had concrete evidence to prove their facts as they are confronted with the situation daily.
- It was an enthusiastic group that would encourage you as a facilitator to work hard.
- The lowest qualification of my action learning group is an honours degree which shows that they are capable of academic writing.
- The team members liked the AL/AR approach where one learns from another and felt that this type of research is user friendly, and it is the quickest way to complete a research, unlike the old approach, which is abstract.
- Their attitude towards this research and working as a group was remarkably positive.

Conclusion

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to management for nominating me to participate in this project. The project was thought provoking and challenging, and I learned a lot especially sharing of ideas not only with the team but also with the rest of my colleagues who were chosen to take part in this project. I would like to thank the Australian team who voluntarily imparted their knowledge of research unselfishly to us.

We invite people to submit reports of work-in-progress or information about completed projects - so that we can all become aware of the wide variety of options available to us.

Implementation of quality assurance in the Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences

Kega Mphokeng

Lecturer, Communication Department
Technikon Northern Gauteng

After training in quality assurance project in the Netherlands, I was watertight, not knowing where to start and how to start. One morning something triggered in my mind that, introspection is one road to success. Before looking into the problems of the students, one should start by looking into what can be the root of the problem. As tutors, what is it that we are doing to satisfy our students? Students used to complain about their results after every test or examination. How to minimise those problems? This is a question that needs attention from us as tutors.

I realised that, in order to solve this problem successfully, I should start from the root. Where is the root? In our case the root involves the following various aspects: study material, question papers, memoranda, as well as moderators.

These four factors opened the door for me to start implementing quality assurance in my faculty. I then realised that quality assurance is not an individual issue but is every employee's business. I established a faculty quality assurance committee comprising of representatives from each department in the faculty.

That is where my project started and it penetrated to every member in the faculty. During the committee meetings, we started brainstorming and agreed on the following objective – to listen to complaints from the students after every test or examination series.

Collaboratively we agreed that a workshop must be organised and make staff aware of the need for an improvement of question papers, memoranda, study material and moderator's role. Invitations were circulated and a workshop was conducted.

Workshop

All stakeholders attended and the problem was discussed. The success of the workshop was proven by a reduced number of student complaints and subsequently an improvement in results. This will be a continuous exercise.

What I learned

- You will never know that you can until you take initiatives.
- 'We mark the road by walking'. Our mark will be noticed after an action.
- What you need to be identified in a specific way.
- Sharing is a necessary instrument for communicating ideas.
- Action Research and Action Learning is similar to quality assurance and self-reflection.

Resistance to change

It is a normal thing to have people who resist change. There are still some lecturers who display negativity about bringing a change into what they are doing. They assume quality assurance is about policing, adding too much workload on what they already have and therefore regard it as a fruitless process. In Afrikaans they say, 'Agter os ook gaan in die kraal'. Meaning that it is a matter of time, even if they drag their feet, they will ultimately follow suit and reach the destination. 'Maybe they are doing quality and just not aware of it.'

It was not an easy hurdle to jump. It was difficult for them to attend the meetings because of time and the workload they have as their daily routine. Some experienced resistance from their colleagues in the department and this hindered their blooming ideas.

Conclusion

In quality assurance we strive to achieve objectives that will make us proud. Sustainable programs are the key to change.

For us in an institution, which is in the process of transformation, it is a challenge to strive to juxtapose ourselves with other institutions that are miles away from us with regard to quality education. 'Every person's participation in quality education, will lead us to the edge of success'.

Why action learning should be used as a learning and teaching method for IT students

Patricia Msimanga

Jnr Lecturer, Computer Studies
Technikon Northern Gauteng

What is your dream?

We all have dreams. Information technology students also have dreams. Their dreams are similar and limited either to being a system analyst, networker, telecommunicator, programmer, computer technician, IT manager, businessperson or lecturer.

We can have the same dream in life but reach that dream in different ways. Action learning and action research shows us that there are many ways to reach the same dream. In the IT world our dream is to solve problems. How to solve them will be the student's problem. You can have many solutions to one problem.

I agree with Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt's praxis saying that AL aims at the participant's empowerment and self-confidence in their ability to create "grounded theory" - that is theory grounded in experience and practice by solving complex problems in totally new situations collaboratively as a team, with everyone in the team being a "personal scientist" contributing in different ways and equally.

Technology changes rapidly. AL becomes more important and relevant. IT needs to learn faster, more accurately and creatively, also ethically to be sustainable in a global world.

Personal Construct Theory (PCT) says everyone is a "personal scientist". This means that it is not the privilege of experts and professional scientists to advance knowledge that we may then accept and apply, but rather that all of us are capable of creating knowledge at various levels. Zuber-Skerritt also says that we are not passive receivers of knowledge, but active constructors and interpreters of our experiences. I agree with her, because I teach students principles on how to structure a program in a particular language, which is passing knowledge to them. They have to interpret and construct the new solution to the problem.

Conclusion

AL and AR are most suitable techniques for future use for information technology students and lecturers. They help us use the greatest gifts(s) that "God" gave us all - skills, knowledge plus learning through action or action through learning.

Do you have a dream? Keep on dreaming through ALAR...
until you reach it!!!

Developing students' project management skills through action research and action learning

Manoko Seerane

Snr Academic Development Practitioner
Technikon Northern Gauteng

Using Action Research and Action Learning with the students was a first-time experience for me. In the beginning I was both excited and frightened. This reflection paper aims to highlight my experiences and those of my group members.

The project was aimed at creating opportunities for a group of students who wanted to start their own business, to develop business skills, starting with project management skills.

Organisational learning outcomes

The Engineering faculty of our Technikon has chosen Project Oriented Learning as one of the learner-centred approaches. While the institution is getting itself (staff, admin, infrastructure) ready for this endeavour, students also need to be prepared to deal with the new way learning. Even though I was working with a small group of students, the experience has taught me that AR/AL can be used to develop the much needed skills for students to succeed. Since I started with Action Learning more and more students from all faculties are approaching me to help them with their projects through AR/AL. These include topics like AIDS/HIV, food processing mechanisms, etc.

Team learning outcomes

Learners in South Africa (if not everywhere else) are usually very exam-oriented and will only do academic activities that

yield results like grades/marks/points. I was worried at the beginning of the project that they might not be committed to the project, but I was proved wrong. This is probably because through AR/AL the team could identify their vision, plan their project and manage the whole process themselves. From the comments of the students made during our reflection meetings, and through my own observation during the course of the project, I can say that my set has achieved its goal.

The students are now at a level where they apply the principles of Action Learning to take the process forward. They are now co-facilitators in Team Business and have trained 75 other students who are involved in other projects, using Action Learning.

Personal learning outcomes

As a Student Development Practitioner any new, innovative strategies that can be employed to make a difference in the way students learn are always welcome. This project has been very exciting for me, but very demanding as well. My set reached a stage where they continued even when I was not available, and at times it made me feel guilty. I needed to work really hard, sometimes even during weekends, to be where I am with the group.

As far as Action Research is concerned, I learnt for the first time that one can do research and actually ENJOY IT!

I had tremendous support from various people, colleagues, the faculty of engineering, my Head of School, and the director of our research unit. I will continue to support the group even after Australia – South Africa Links project is completed, because through AL/AR we have established very strong internal links. Isn't that what Action Learning is about?

The use of action research to promote reflective practice among Technikon educators

Caroline Selepe

Snr Academic Development Practitioner
Technikon Northern Gauteng

This is a report on the highlights of my reflections on the project in general. It is presented in three sections that show learning outcomes at the organisational level, the team and the personal level.

Organisational learning outcomes

One of the Technikons primary mission strengths is to build capacity and undertake projects in the fields of social, applied, and product oriented research relevant to community and regional development needs as well as in research that deepens our understanding of the process of learning and teaching. The AL/ AR project has helped partially in achieving this outcome by providing opportunities for research capacity building. This project has actually made some impact in helping educators to start reflecting on their work and approaching each task or activity through the eye of an action researcher. Even though all the work or task processes are not documented, it is somehow evident through conversations and interviews with other educators that it has made some little impact on their teaching.

The institutional three-year plan has as one of its objectives, the professional development of academic staff, assessment and development of programs that promote increased retention. This projects has allowed me as an Academic Development Practitioner to reflect on these objectives, the approach we have been using previously in offering teaching

development programs. I have realised that the action learning and research approach is the best as compared to the isolated teaching development programs.

This project has provided the project participants with the opportunity for gaining experience in research as well as using the action learning and research approach to improve their teaching and learning activities.

Team learning outcomes

The AL/AR approach prescribes collaboration and teamwork. The team approach helped me to share experiences, ideas, weaknesses, strengths and difficulties with other members. During the year, members of the core set brainstormed and shared their achievement and frustrations with each other at the monthly meetings. These helped a lot in achieving some objectives in personal development, especially with skills such as interpersonal relations, creative thinking and of course research.

Working in teams has helped us to develop a sense of openness, security, academic leadership and trust in each other. At the beginning individuals felt a fear for research (because of stereotyping by experts in traditional research), and we were threatened by the new approach and the idea of working so closely with “strangers”. However the principles and processes of working in AL/AR sets soon eradicated these negative factors. During the team meetings we “confronted” a lot of racial and cultural issues. The project had a positive effect in helping us in developing skills to handle racial and cultural differences and to be sensitive to diversity.

Personal learning outcomes

It was very difficult at the beginning of the project to understand what the AL/AR project was all about. I had to do a lot of reading on the theory of action learning and research. It was only after six months that I managed to

gather a clear understanding of the process. Since then, I have used the approach in almost all my teaching development activities, perhaps even to conduct personal and family business. In short, the main personal highlights were:

- personal development/growth-capacity building, knowledge development, confrontation of my fear of research and publishing and of conference presentations;
- knowledge provides power and confidence to take leadership position in individual sets;
- acceptance of criticism;
- initial difficulties in theme and topic selection;
- building of personal relationships/openness to colleagues and peers;
- commitment and dedication to change via action research and action learning;
- I am able to use the AL/AR principles in managing my own life holistically. In a nutshell, this is the most important highlight of my experiences in the whole project.

Conclusion

The project objectives were good but the implementation phase had lots of hassles in it. My belief was that we were going to experience “real” leadership development in terms of general academic management development. This was not the case. Mentoring did not take place as expected. My expectations in the project were partially met. I hope this has been lesson for future mentoring and leadership projects. It is recommended that mentoring really be put into practice through out the project.

How to apply action learning in large classes

Yvonne Senne
Technikon North West

I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in the Leadership Program. On reflection, since my involvement in the project, the following positive changes have occurred.

In my occupational life:

- I was able to reflect on my own classroom practices and was driven to recognise the need to change for effectiveness;
- I was able to share the information with colleagues and together we identified ways of improving classroom practices and student performance through action learning;
- I realised that problems at work are not insurmountable and was able to network with women in similar positions and share information and related problems;
- I managed to get approval for my first conference paper abstract.

In my personal life:

- I was able to realise that I am in charge of my own destiny;
- Colleagues selected me as first choice in a leadership position;
- I became more assertive and self-confident;
- I realised that I had virtues and the potential to build on those to overcome my weaknesses.

I acknowledge that my project did not go as planned, but the achievements indicated above are, in my opinion, indications of greater achievements in the future.

The project did more to develop me as a leader than any other developmental intervention I have been exposed to in my work life.

Suggestions for future collaboration:

- Development of joint research projects with Australian mentors;
- Information sharing and development of staff exchange programs;
- Academic studies through Australian institutions and maybe extending linkages to non-TNG institutions;
- Strengthening of relationships with mentors even after project completion.

Using action research and action learning to develop academic skills and promote life long learning in the Faculty of Engineering

Jeannie Snyman

Academic Development Practitioner

Technikon Northern Gauteng

This paper is a reflection on my personal learning outcomes as well as the organisational and team learning outcomes for the project. Reflection has a very specific function in the Action Research (AR) spiral of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. Reflection can lead to a reconstruction of the meaning of the social situation and provides a basis for

further planning of critically informed action, thereby continuing the cycle (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

Personal learning outcomes

Being involved in this project made me aware of the role that an individual can play, and the difference a person can make in an organisation. Addressing existing problems changed the attitudes of people and made people aware of the fact that there is a way (in this case action research/learning) to solve problems in a 'scientific' way.

The knowledge that I have gained about research gave me the confidence to get involved in other research projects. The information given to us by the project leaders from Australia was of a very high standard, and will and can be used by other people and myself in the institution. The visit to Australia gave me the opportunity to present a paper at an international conference, and this built my confidence in research even further. Working on this project forced me to read a lot of scientific articles, books and journals, and I think this is a very important growing point to get to for doing further research.

Team learning outcomes

Learning outcomes for the action learning/research set of 18 woman academics:

Because of the diversity of the team, there was a lot of conflict and differences were highlighted. We all became aware of the fact that group dynamics is a very difficult process. To really function effectively in a group, all the members have to be aware of the role they have to play in this dynamic process. The importance that communication plays also became very clear.

Learning outcomes for action learning/research set of students were:

- to share their knowledge and skills;

- to work together as a team;
- to develop their communication and interpersonal skills: listening and attending, reflecting back and questioning, disclosure and assertion, giving and receiving feedback and specifying actions.

These were very important outcomes, because they addressed the skills that needed to be developed in the students as part of the project.

Organisational learning outcomes

Lecturers at the Technikon became aware of the importance for a tertiary institution to become more learner-centred. Being learner-centred made it easier to notice and identify problems that the learners have, and address them more appropriately.

The fact that people reported on their project findings at Faculty seminar days made other lecturers aware of the action research/learning process. The concept of action research/learning is now a well-known method of doing research in the Technikon.

Conclusion

Reflecting on both my project and the larger Australia – South Africa Links projects demonstrated the power of Action Research/ Action Learning as a problem-solving tool. These reflections will now become the basis for transformed or new knowledge, and decisions on further action. This new action will now be more informed and directed.

References

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Using action research to promote reflective teaching

Masebala Tjabane
Teaching Development
Technikon Vaal Triangle

The aim of this paper is to describe the first steps in an action research project examining whether teachers reflecting on held beliefs or philosophies of teaching will impact on classroom dynamics in particular, and institutional change in general. As a newly appointed Technikon staff developer, the project leads teachers to focus and reflect on their philosophy with regard to student-centeredness in their teaching through an action research and action learning process. The study is important because the process of reflection and the findings may offer insights into teaching in higher education, and from this, improve the practice of both staff developers and teachers as they critically examine and reflect on their practice. The project becomes a junction for several important and interrelated concepts; those of reflective teaching, student-centred learning, and teacher change; the means for bringing these concepts together and for the change process for both the staff developer and the teachers has been action research. The paper sets out to demonstrate teacher change towards reflective teaching. A look at some of the implications that reflective practices and action research has for teacher change and organizational change concludes the paper.

Organisational learning outcomes

The mission of our centre is to “enhance the quality of teaching and learning in higher education”. The process that I went through as a participant in the Links program has contributed towards the mission in the following ways:

- the introduction of action research and action learning to newly appointed academic staff members;
- the sharing of ideas and trends in the field of management particularly process managements.

The mission statements above also promote the core business of the whole institution, however, I would like to avoid being overly ambitious by stating whole organisational outcomes at this stage. It is premature to state such macro outcomes. They can only be stated as spin off from future action research ventures.

I would also like to state that the adoption of the concept of action research, action learning and process management is not and will not be an easy and smooth process because of the conservatism of some staff members at the Technikon. I have come to the conviction that conservatism and resistance to change cannot dampen my enthusiasm for the new paradigms.

Personal and team learning outcomes

My action research group experienced the following:

- learning to practice what we preach;
- synchronicity (the paper and spin offs from each participant are evidence to this – watch this space!);
- motivational, empowering and emotional intelligence;
- demystification and exposure to the world of academic research;
- international collaboration and networking.

The points listed above are a continuous process that enriches the understanding and appreciation of learning and is a life long process for all involved. We all felt that it would be a great idea if the project could be extended to enrich other academics.

Working with mentors

I experienced real mentorship during the last phase of the project. It was and is still is an informative and worthwhile experience. Not only did I develop and learn tremendously from my assigned mentor, I also gained a great deal from all the Australian academics. This experience demonstrated to me the true nature and ability of women to nurture, develop and empower. It further shows that in every successful venture, there are women who conceive ideas and carry them to full fruition. The hiccups I experienced are overshadowed by the positive experience in the end.

I acknowledge funding support from AusAID. I also acknowledge Associate Professor Penny McKay, Queensland University of Technology, Australia, for her encouragement and advice and my set members Ms Virginia Radebe, Ms Onica Skhosana, Mr Mike Nemavhola, Mr Steve Liee, Mr Tshepo Tsipetsi and Mr Mike Achmad.

**Action research in computer literacy:
The development of a modularised
curriculum for end user computing**
Gail Janse van Rensburg
Senior Lecturer, Computer End Using
Vaal Triangle Technikon

In South Africa the Higher Education Act (1997) has as its purpose the transformation of the higher education system and its institutions through an outcomes based education system. Concurrent with its mission, the Vaal Triangle

Technikon undertook the complex task to review its programs to provide optimal learning opportunities that will overcome inequality and inefficiency. During the second semester of 2000, staff members were encouraged to participate in research on the curriculum development program. Lecturers in the Department of End User Computing took part by initiating a case study to transform the offering of computer literacy courses.

At the same time, the Australia – South Africa Institutional Links project was initiated. The Links project aimed to develop leadership skills of academic women from Technikons in South Africa. This was being pursued through training, support and conducting collaborative action learning programs within and across institutions.

This paper reflects on the leadership outcomes achieved during the above case study and the Links project.

My Organisation and I

Organisational leadership springs from a clear vision and mission. Technikon Management fosters a climate and culture of research, learning, academic excellence and community development in the service of our country. Through a research directorate, management encourages and supports learners and staff to engage and participate in research projects.

It was in midst of an uncompromising disagreement on corporate research between the departments of Curriculum Development and Research that I joined the Links project. I needed to apply for funding to take part in the Links workshops and to attend the 5th ALARPM World Congress in Australia during September 2000 in the early stages of our case study. I found that there existed inconsistent views regarding research, and in particular Action Research. The research directorate stated that I was wasting my time with

“such a project” and that I dare not present such work at an international conference (April 2000). The Dean of my faculty encouraged me to follow the correct procedures and apply for funding anyway. My application was returned to me with critique on the format of the document. Time was running out and I was confused and frustrated. I received real pro-active support from the HOD, Curriculum Development, who facilitated our Action Research project. She mentioned my funding problems to the Vice-Rector Academic as well as to the Rector. Funds were immediately approved, proving the commitment of management to entrust me with such an opportunity.

Research output at the institution has to be in the form of original research articles in approved journals, dissertations, theses and reports on research. On my return from Australia, I prepared a detailed report to management and made a presentation on a Research Project day on my experiences abroad. Not one of my line managers attended, although top management was satisfied with the outcomes.

As a research set, we were given the authority to plan and do the work we were capable of doing and to try out new strategies. Without confidence to reach out and try new things, there is no risk taking or long-term success. The set felt that changes were allowed in the short term, but that line management was reluctant to allow us to implement our findings on a permanent basis.

During March 2001 part of the set attended a conference for Technikon Computer Lecturers (TECLA) and experienced a need for solving common End User Computing problems and an urgent need for change amongst other lecturers. Thriving on change, with the help of the department Curriculum Development, I organised a National Forum (May 2001). Realising this is the only way to manage change from my position, I challenged the process. With a national voice we were going straight to the top: our

recommendations will be presented to the CTM (Committee for Tutorial Matters) and will be implemented nationally. I finally felt that we have succeeded, that changes are taking place, that I can be a leader, without being a manager.

In summary I have learned from leadership in my organisation that:

- collaboration and co-operation is vital in working towards shared goals;
- researchers should take an active interest in the concerns of others, for example line managers and other departments to foster collaboration and networking;
- the more you make yourself available for new challenges, the more you are expected to do. Also, the harder you drive yourself, the more you put your fellow employees in an uncomfortable position and you may lose their interest and friendship;
- for a researcher to function under circumstances of (severe) positive and/or negative impact while conducting a case study and still perform your duties, achieve your outcomes and function in all your roles is certainly stressful. If you don't firmly control tasks, requests and interruptions, you will not survive corporate stress;
- it is difficult for some managers to empower others – they might have a personal need to maintain power for themselves. In the contrary, I have a need for autonomy and being in control of my own work.

My Team and I

Directed by our facilitator, we selected our set. Except for one lecturer, whose entire personality is in conflict with the processes of Action Research, the set actively and co-operatively carried out the actions in our event track. We

were novices in Action Research, but willing to learn and we embarked on overcoming the fear of research with growing self-confidence. We produced results and learned to control relationships and emotions. We were empowered, supervised and encouraged by our facilitator in an unknown battlefield.

I started off as an excellent follower, I think for myself, can give constructive criticism, am my own person, and am innovative and creative. Keeping together a group with a heavy workload and fostering positive attitudes, I learned that not people, but only processes can be managed. I became aware of weaknesses in my own leadership skills. Set meetings as well as the monthly Links meetings helped me to overcome those weaknesses and strengthening corporate, cross-cultural and cross-institutional relationships.

The set communicated effectively through email and monthly meetings after a series of weekly meetings over a short period during the planning phase. When you heard nothing from someone, you knew she was working very hard, and that things were going well. Not all members always carried out their responsibilities, due to different reasons. Therefore communication with other departments, such as Examinations, was often neglected.

During our last reflection session, we philosophised that:

- you determine your own happiness and have the power to prevent others to influence you negatively. Always be yourself;
- you have to set priorities and selectively decide on your tasks. You need wisdom and have to be clever enough to know for which opportunities to say NO;
- change is necessary. We are the 'agents of change'. It is of great frustration when people are negative to change.

As Action Researchers, we have the knowledge to realise the need for and advantage of change and therefore it is difficult to except the fact that other people feel different. At first, work with those who are positive to change;

- Action Research is a philosophy of life;
- as a set, we want to express our ideas and findings publicly, not because of the Action Research philosophy, but because as researchers we are ready to.



*A group photo of the South African women academics and their
Australian mentors taken at the Hiea Safari Ranch,
South Africa, August 2001.*

Profiles

The following biographical profiles briefly introduce the Australian mentors who generously gave their time and energy to the Australian – South African Links Project titled *Leadership Development of Academic Women Through Action Learning and Action Research*, which was funded by AusAID.

Lyn Cundy

Lyn Cundy is Editor of the ALAR Journal and was Secretary of ALARPM for three years. She has a PhD in Human Resource Management and is a recruitment and selection consultant with Merit Solutions. Her interests in teaching and research are in the areas of organisational behaviour and organisation structure and design.

Her doctoral thesis used a constructivist paradigm and combined phenomenology and grounded theory methodology to develop a substantive grounded theory to explain the process of organisational commitment among midwives in two quite different hospital settings. The theory suggests that meaningful dialogue between individuals and groups may enhance organisational commitment and learning by actually changing the cultural context and the patterns of relationship that define the organisation's identity.

Angela Delves

Angela Delves is Professor and the Vice-President and Pro Vice-Chancellor (Enterprise & International), Southern Cross University, Lismore (NSW).

Angela has been an advocate for gender equity throughout her academic career and has been committed to support measures to enable women to pursue both academic and administrative careers, in parallel with other family duties.

Her position includes the following broad areas of responsibility:

- International programs policy development
- Commercial relationships
- Diversifying and increasing sources of income
- Strategic regional and community development and interaction
- Strategic development of Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie and Tweed campuses
- Noresearch
- Alumni affairs
- Marketing and external relations
- Cellulose Valley Technology Park
- Promotion of industry partnerships

Mary Farquahar

Mary Farquahar is an Associate Professor in the School of Asian & International Studies, Griffith University, Brisbane. Her qualifications include a PhD (Griffith University); Postgrad (Beijing University); Language (Beijing Language Institute); Law (Hons 1 - University of Queensland); Arts (Hons 1 - Australian National University).

Her relevant research and teaching is in a range of interdisciplinary studies, usually with a China or Asian focus: cinema, law, language, cinema, mass media, arts and education. I am a recognised scholar of the Chinese cinema and an international authority on Chinese children's literature and Chinese concepts of childhood.

She has been awarded more than \$400,000.00 in competitive grants and she has published widely, including three book-length publications (on Chinese children's literature, cinema and languages education) over the last five years.

Nanette Gottlieb

Nanette Gottlieb is an Associate Professor and the Head of the School of Languages and Comparative Cultural Studies at the University of Queensland, Brisbane.

She teaches Japanese language, Japanese Studies and research methodology courses and has a particular interest in postgraduate supervision issues, especially in relation to writing the thesis.

She has published several books and many articles on aspects of language and society in Japan, including script policy, the impact of information technology on written Japanese, Japanese on the Internet and discriminatory language in Japan.

Penny McKay

Penny McKay is an Associate Professor and the coordinator of the TESOL Unit in the School of Cultural and Language Studies in Education, Faculty of Education, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane.

She has published widely on policy and practice in relation to the teaching of English as a Second Language in schools (primary and secondary), and in particular in relation to assessment and the monitoring of English language progress of these students. She has taught in primary and secondary schools and in universities in Australia. She has addressed conferences and teacher groups in England, Canada, the United States, Hong Kong and Australia.

Marilyn McMeniman

Marilyn McMeniman (BA, DipEd [Qld], MA [Lond], PhD [Qld]) is Professor and Dean of Education, Griffith University. She has held academic positions at both the University of Queensland and Griffith University since 1973. As a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Queensland in the 1980s, she co-authored five national and state Reviews and, in 1993, she was seconded to the Queensland Government's Review of the Queensland School Curriculum as the educator on the three-member Panel which resulted in *Shaping the Future*.

In 1995, she was awarded the inaugural Griffith University Postgraduate Students Association "Supervisor of the Year." In 1994/95, she was foundation Head of the School of Languages and Applied Linguistics, Griffith University, and has acted as an external reviewer of university language schools. Her main teaching and research interests include language acquisition and learning, research methods, teaching and learning processes (strategic learning), and motivation to learn. She has been awarded more than \$300,000 in competitive grants and her publications include

seven books/monographs, six book chapters, over 25 refereed journal articles and numerous conference presentations. In 1994, she presented Griffith University's Public Research Lecture Putting Thinking Back Into Language Learning and, since 1997, has chaired the University's Teaching and Learning Excellence Committee. In 1997, membership of the Order of Australia (AM) was conferred for "service to education in the fields of curriculum theory and practice, language acquisition, research and administration".

Sandra Speedy

Sandra Speedy is Professor and Director, Graduate College of Management, Southern Cross University, Lismore (NSW). She has 26 years experience in the higher education sector, which has been equally divided between administration, management, teaching and research. At Southern Cross University she was Professor and Dean, Faculty of Health Sciences from 1991-1996, Dean of Student Affairs 1995-1996, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Policy & Planning) 1994-1995; acting Vice-Chancellor for varying periods.

Sandra is a registered psychologist and registered nurse and holds an Honours degree in Psychology, a Postgraduate Diploma in Education, a Masters degree in Urban and Regional Planning, and a doctorate in Educational Administration. Her research interests include women's health, child sexual assault, rural health and mental health management, leadership, women in management, organisational cultures, power and politics within organisations and ethics within organisations.

Sandra has conducted a number of consultancies in curriculum development, faculty structure and design, rural and mental health, and leadership. Her publishing areas have included: leadership, gender issues, nursing theory, nursing research, sociology, feminism and feminist research, the therapeutic alliance, faculty development, mental health

and psychotherapies. Her major consultancies have been in the areas of leadership, action learning and action research, community consultation in rural health, nursing curricula and teaching methods, and organisational behaviour.

Linda Worrall

Linda Worrall (PhD) is the Director of the Communication Disability in Ageing Research Unit within the Department of Speech Pathology and Audiology at the University of Queensland, Brisbane.

Her research centres around the World Health Organisation's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health as it applies to the communication of older people and people with communication disabilities, particularly aphasia.

She has published three books and over 50 scientific articles and is about to publish a fourth book with Dr Louise Hickson on communication disability in ageing. She is a Fellow of the Speech Pathology Association of Australia and received a Commendation for Excellence in Teaching from the University of Queensland.

Robyn Zevenbergen

Robyn Zevenbergen is a Senior Lecturer in Mathematics Education at Griffith University, Brisbane. She works predominantly in the area of equity and social justice in mathematics education. While her work is focused mainly in the primary area, she also works in secondary and research methods - particularly with qualitative methods such as ethnography and action research.

She is currently working on a number of projects, one of which is a government-funded project investigating the barriers to learning mathematics from a sociological

standpoint. She is also working in the area of language and mathematics.

Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt

Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt is Director of OZI (Ortrun Zuber International P/L), specialising in Action Learning & Action Research, Leadership Programs, Postgraduate Research Training & Supervision, incl. Qualitative Research Methods. She is Adjunct Professor in the Faculty of Education at Griffith University (Brisbane) and at Southern Cross University (Lismore, Australia), as well as Professor of Professional and Organisational Development in the UK-based International Management Centres (IMC).

After her under- and postgraduate studies in Germany, she obtained three doctoral degrees in Australia: PhD in Literature (UQ), PhD in Higher Education (Deakin) and DLitt in Management Education (IMC, Pacific Region). She was awarded over \$1million in competitive grants and has published 26 books, over 30 book chapters, over 100 journal articles, papers and reports, and produced over 50 video programs. She has been invited to conduct short courses and workshops in Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Africa and Europe (Germany, Austria, Holland, Sweden, England) for academics, and senior managers in industry conducting workplace-based projects towards a Master or Doctoral degree.

We welcome profiles of people engaged in action learning or action research. You could submit your own or offer to write one on behalf of someone you know

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Through the ALAR Journal, we aim to promote the study and practice of action learning and action research and to develop personal networking on a global basis.

We welcome contributions in the form of:

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- project descriptions, including work in progress (maximum 1000 words)
- information about a local action research/action learning network
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- book reviews
- report on a study or research trip
- comments on previous contributions

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We strongly encourage dual or multiple authorship. This may involve a combination of experienced and inexperienced practitioners, theoreticians, clients, and authors from different sectors or disciplines. Joint authors who disagree about some theoretical or practical point are urged to disclose their differences in their report. We would be pleased to see informed debate within a report.

You may have interesting case material but may be uncertain of its theoretical underpinning. If so, approach us. We may

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