

**Teachers as action researchers: Some reflections on what it takes**

TERRY LOCKE  
*School of Education*  
*University of Waikato*  
*New Zealand*

**A paper presented at the IAIMTE (International Association for the Improvement of Mother Tongue Education) Conference on Learning and Teaching Language and Literature, Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, June 23 -26, 2009**

## Teachers as action researchers: Some reflections on what it takes

TERRY LOCKE

*University of Waikato*

*ABSTRACT: Towards the end of 2006, a group of secondary and primary teachers, in collaboration with university researchers based at the University of Waikato, began a two-year journey where they researched their own practice as teachers of literature in multicultural classrooms in Auckland, New Zealand. This presentation briefly outlines the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI), which initially provided a vision of teachers, working in partnership with university researchers, researching their own practice with the aim of enhancing the practice of the teaching profession as a whole. Through the eyes of one of the university-based researchers, but drawing on the experiences of four of the teacher participants, this presentation reflects on factors that had a bearing on the successful (or otherwise) induction of these teachers as teacher-researchers in their own right.*

### INTRODUCTION

The New Zealand Ministry of Education (MOE) established the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) in 2002 with the aim of supporting research “that will provide information that can be used in policies and practices to bring about improvements in outcomes for learners” (MOE, 2002, cited in Berger and Baker, 2008, p. 1). The New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) was appointed as programme co-ordinator for the grant, charged with the development of guidelines for applicants, managing the selection process and overseeing the conduct of the one-, two- and three-year projects of successful grantees. In its first five years of operating, the TLRI funded around 55 projects based in the early childhood, school or post-school sectors.

As originally conceived, the TLRI had three aims:

- to build a cumulative body of knowledge linking teaching and learning;
- to enhance the links between educational research and teaching practices – and researchers and teachers – across early childhood, school, and tertiary sectors;
- to grow research capability and capacity in the areas of teaching and learning (TLRI, 2003, revised 2008).

Prospective grantees were expected to justify their proposals by articulating clear strategic, research and practice values. Central to this vision was the notion of practitioners (in most cases teachers) as research partners. According to TLRI coordinators, Berger and Baker, this stipulation was meant “to lessen the commonplace occurrence of research that is done *on* or *to* practitioners rather than *with* practitioners” (2008, p. 3).

In a 2008 paper reflecting on the projects undertaken since TLRI’s inception, Berger and Baker identified two key “archetypes of practitioner/researcher partnerships” (p.

3):

1. “Practitioner as research assistant”: In this model, the researcher’s knowledge and expertise is central and practitioners are relegated to a kind of helper role. Major research tasks such as the determination of research questions and the research design are the prerogative of the researcher, who also takes responsibility for data analysis. While practitioners are valued as informants, the role in the actual research process is likely to be minor one, for example, certain kinds of data collection.
2. “Researcher and practitioner as associates”: In this model, researchers and teachers work in collaboration, drawing on the mutual expertise of both groups at all stages of the research process (2008, p. 4).

While Berger and Baker identify strengths and limitations in both models, they effectively concur with the recommendations of an independent review of TLRI (Gilmore, 2007) which suggested that the second model had serious drawbacks in practice – reflected in perceived inadequacies in relation to scope, research design and links to academic literature. While teachers might learn a lot in this model, researchers often learnt little.

As a consequence of this review process, TLRI guidelines have changed – a change reflected in the tenor of the following paragraph:

They are to be led or co-led by an experienced principal investigator and be designed in a way that explicitly offers opportunities for emerging researchers to develop their skills (so that in time they might develop the expertise required of a principal investigator). Researcher–practitioner partnerships are to be integral to the design of the project. The partnership, however, is to guide the research question(s) but not drive the project. To this end there is to be a focus on the individuals in the team using their *collective* expertise rather than on explicitly developing the research skills of the practitioner members of the project team. It is, however, pivotal that all team members have the opportunity to learn. In this collaboration, practitioners might take the role of advisory board, data gatherers, informants, etc. and not necessarily be integral to *all* aspects of the thinking inside the partnership. It is, of course, necessary that the researchers have clear and consistent regard for practice and practitioners and that the practitioners have clear and consistent regard for research and researchers (TLRI, 2009, p. 6)

It is clear that a different tightrope is being walked in 2009 than was being walked in 2003.

## **TEACHING LITERATURE IN THE MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM**

The project I am drawing on in this presentation commenced in December, 2006 and was to occupy two years. Funding was applied for under the old TLRI dispensation, and in retrospect, those of us classified as university-based researchers (though all of us had taught in schools) would have seen ourselves as subscribing to the second model described above. That is, we aspired to the development of a non-hierarchical arrangement, which would be reflected in a collaborative and respectful relationship between university and school-based researchers, all of whom were viewed as bringing to the project complementary knowledges.

Seven teachers from seven schools with culturally diverse populations, four secondary, two intermediate and one primary in South and West Auckland were involved in the project, which was coordinated by researchers (including the writer) from the Arts and Language Education Department at the University of Waikato. From the start, we referred to these colleagues as “teacher-researchers”. The project set itself the following research questions:

1. What discourses currently shape teacher understandings of “literature teaching” and “cultural and linguistic inclusiveness”? How do these discourses relate to each other and to the larger context of the national policy environment?
2. What features characterise the successful classroom practices/processes of a sample of teachers engaging students in activities aimed at fostering their ability to engage in the reading and composition of literary texts?
3. In particular, what aspects of pedagogy have been successful in developing a culturally and linguistically inclusive classroom for the teaching and learning of literature? (These aspects may include programme design, resourcing, activity design and formative assessment.)
4. In what ways can ICTs be integrated productively in a culturally and linguistically inclusive classroom for the teaching and learning of literature?

It would seem that the TLRI review process discussed previously has led to a view of the research design as paramount and the researcher-practitioner relationship, while important, as a subordinate consideration. Looking back, it has become clear to me that as university-based researchers, we made the researcher-practitioner relationship central to design considerations, as I will explain. On the face of it, we were skirting with danger, if the retrospective wisdom of the TLRI review is anything to go on. That is, we were courting the possibility of the success of the project in terms of scope, findings, generalisability and dissemination being jeopardized by our according our “teacher researchers” too strong a voice. However, from this 2009 vantage point, I would contend that five of our participating teachers performed successfully as researchers of their own practice. (And, it would appear, our NZCER overseers were pleased with us.<sup>1</sup>)

Our final report, which as I write is being edited by NZCER, has a lot to say about what we learnt *through* our teacher-researchers about effective teaching practices around literary study. We also learnt a lot *about* our teachers and ourselves in terms of professional content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge and the discourses underpinning them (Locke *et al.*, 2008). However, my focus for the rest of this presentation is what we learnt about what is required to transform classroom teachers into research-savvy practitioners.

---

<sup>1</sup> Among other things, Senior NZCER Researcher, Sue McDowall, had this to say about the project after reading its final report. “The report says some things about the place of literature in New Zealand classrooms, and about English teaching, learning, and assessment more generally, that need to be said. Including both primary and secondary teachers in this project made it possible to notice and to say some of these things. There are clear implications for policy and teacher education and I hope these will be acted on. Your suggestion that the study of literary texts be seen as a vehicle for building key competencies is strategic.”

## Methodology

As mentioned previously, our view of the researcher-practitioner relationship had a bearing on research method. The project was framed broadly in action research terms because of its adaptive, tentative and evolutionary nature. As Burns (1994) states:

Action-research is a total process in which a “problem situation” is diagnosed, remedial action planned and implemented, and its effect monitored, if improvements are to get underway. It is both an approach to problem solving and a problem-solving process (p. 294).

Implicit in action-research methodology is the notion of a cycle of problem definition, data collection, reflective analysis and planning, monitored action, reflection leading to a phase of redefinition that restarts the cycle. Such a cycle seemed admirably suited to our expectation that for each teacher, the specific nature of their interventions and the learning objectives attached to them would be a matter of negotiation.

As long ago as 1988, Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) were highlighting the collaborative aspect of action research, distinguishing three types of changes in relation to the work of individual teachers and the culture of groups.

1. Changes in discourse: ways in which teachers “word” or “story” their identities, knowledges and pedagogical practices;
2. Changes in “activities and practices”: what teachers actually do in their work and continuing learning;
3. Changes in “social relationships and organizations”: the ways in which teachers relate with students, parents and the wider community, and with colleagues at a departmental, school and general professional level (pp. 14-15).

The adoption of an action-research framework was consonant with a desire to enhance teacher professionalism by according participating teachers the role of reflective and collaborative generators of their own professional knowledge. According to Jean McNiff (2002), “Action research is an enquiry by the self into the self, undertaken in company with others acting as research participants and critical learning partners” (p. 15). Self-study was a key ingredient in this project (Loughran, 1999) with a key feature being the continual interrogation by all participants of the discursive assumptions that shape (support and/or constrain) one’s practices as a teacher and researcher.

Within this action research framework, we were effectively setting up a series of case studies. Case studies allow for an in depth investigation into *specific* instances with a view to developing or illustrating *general* instances. In the case of this project, the specific instances were particular teachers working with particular classes. As Yin (1989) points out, case study research can be (a) exploratory (description and analysis leading to the development of hypotheses), (b) descriptive (providing narrative accounts and rich vignettes of practice) and (c) explanatory (offering causal explanations of the impact of various interventions).

There was also the potential for these case studies to have an ethnographic aspect. As

Fetterman argues (1998), "...ethnographic study allows multiple interpretations of reality and alternative interpretations of data through the study. The ethnographer is interested in understanding and describing a social and cultural scene from the emic, or insider's, perspective. The ethnographer is both storyteller and scientist..." (p. 2). Fetterman's reference to insiders is pertinent here, in that the project aimed at collaboration among university staff, teachers and children in ways that collapsed the insider/outsider distinction that characterises "them/us" research. The overall theme of this research, in fact, invited an ethnographic focus.

Finally, critical discourse analysis as research method was applied by both university-based researchers and teacher-researchers involved in this project. Put simply, critical discourse analysis sets out to identify taken-for-granted stories about (or constructions of) reality that circulate in society and which invite one to "take positions" on things (Locke, 2004). One of the aims of this project was to identify and if need be contest some taken-for-granted assumptions about what literature is and how it is best taught.

### **Methodological induction**

Given our commitment to a model of teachers as researchers, those of us designated university-based researchers were charged with the task of methodological induction. At the start of the project, we had a limited sense of what this entailed, but as work progressed we found ourselves generating resources and activities in response to what we were defining as induction-related tasks or problems. These can be listed as follows:

- **Task 1:** Committing to a change of role
- **Task 2:** Developing professional self-reflexivity
- **Task 3:** Thinking of my students as research subjects
- **Task 4:** Developing a rationale for a change in practice
- **Task 5:** Designing an intervention
- **Task 6:** Deciding on and determining data to be collected
- **Task 7:** Analysing data
- **Task 8:** Writing up the research story.

The neatness of this list, written retrospectively, belies the extent to which those of us leading the project were making up things as we went along. However, they do match my current sense of the major tasks involved in the induction process. In what follows, I reflect on each of these in turn and discuss some of the strategies used to address the specific demands of the task. To protect the identities of the four secondary teachers (all Heads of Department) involved in the project, I will be referring to them as Teachers 1, 2, 3 and 4.

#### *Committing to a change of role*

This initial stage of induction might be compared to the building-of-belief stage in a process drama.<sup>2</sup> At this early stage of the process, teachers were offered a role, that of

---

<sup>2</sup> Norah Morgan and Juliana Saxton (1987) offer a taxonomy of personal engagement for the drama-in-education situation. In ascending order they suggest: interest, engaging, committing, internalizing, interpreting and evaluating (p. 22).

researcher, even while the full implications of the choice to accept were yet to be teased out. For participants in this project, this began with the decision to be involved, motivated very much by an interest in the topic rather than an understanding of what the role of researcher entailed. A quotation from the project’s full proposal reflects this initial disposition: “[Teacher 1] comes to this project with an interest in how we can improve students’ enjoyment and success in the study of literature written in English and also how we can incorporate students’ mother tongues in this” (Full proposal document). Teachers were initially drawn to the project because they saw themselves as benefiting professionally from it and would be thus better able to meet the needs of their students.

In the first project round-table meeting, teachers were introduced to their researcher role in two main ways. Firstly, their prospective role as a teacher researcher was legitimised through reference to the academic literature which *endorsed* this role. For instance, they were introduced to Lytle and Cochran-Smith’s (1992) definition of teacher research as “systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work”:

- “By **systematic** we refer primarily to ordered ways of gathering and recording information, documenting experiences inside and outside of classrooms, and making some kind of written record”;
- “By **intentional** we signal that teacher research is an activity that is planned rather than spontaneous...”
- “By **inquiry**, we suggest that teacher research stems from or generates questions and reflects teachers’ desires to make sense of their experiences – to adapt a learning stance or openness toward classroom life” (p. 450).

The value of such a resource at this stage in the induction process is that it showed clearly the difference between reflective practice (Schon, 1983) and practitioner research. Secondly, they were given a presentation on the research methodology (as discussed previously) delivered during the meeting which included, for example, a way of thinking about the relationship between questions, methods, relevant data, roles and responsibilities (Table 1 is indicative of the original handout).

Research question	Method	Relevant data	Roles and responsibilities
What discourses currently shape teacher understandings of “literature teaching” and “cultural and linguistic inclusiveness”? How do these discourses relate to each other and to the larger context of the national policy environment?	Self-study Critical discourse analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reflective journals</li> <li>• questionnaires</li> <li>• interviews</li> <li>• policy documents, school schemes, teaching resources, assessment technologies</li> </ul>	Teacher-researchers (TRs) and university researchers (URs) reflect in a collegial way on current and developing views (discourses) relevant to the topic. TRs collaborate with URs in analyzing school-based documents. URs focus on national documentation.
What features characterise the successful classroom practices/processes	Case study research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• questionnaires</li> <li>• semi-structured group interviews or</li> </ul>	TRs and URs work collaboratively in questionnaire design and the design of interventions. URs and TRs can conduct group

<p>of a sample of teachers engaging students in activities aimed at fostering their ability to engage in the reading and composition of literary texts?</p>		<p>focus groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• classroom observations</li> <li>• student work samples</li> <li>• test results</li> </ul>	<p>processes as appropriate. Classroom observations are conducted by URs by invitation and optionally by colleagues in support. Test design may be collaborative or individual. The development of evaluative criteria is a task for URs and TRs collectively and can be thought of as an intervention in itself. Systems of check-making will be developed collaboratively, optionally with colleagues in support. TRs and URs work collaboratively in analyzing data and in developing specific timeframes for data collection and analysis within the broad timeframe of the project.</p>
---	--	--	--

**Table 1. Questions, methods, relevant data, roles and responsibilities**

While such documentation played its part in the induction of teacher researchers, it also forced university researchers to clarify their own thinking on a range of methodological design issues.

*Developing critical self-reflexivity*

According to Bridget Somekh (2009), “the reflexivity which lies at the heart of the action research process is...not only a means of deepening self-understanding and raising sensitivity to the nuances of professional experience – a process of self-education – but a crucial means of increasing the power of action research to have developmental impact” (p. 371) By *critical* self-reflexivity, I mean an “awareness of the ideological imperatives and epistemological presuppositions that inform [one’s] research as well as [one’s] own subjective, intersubjective, and normative reference claims” (Kinchelov & McLaren, 1994, 140). There are two prongs to critical self-reflexivity in research settings. First, researchers need to acknowledge the social constructedness of their research method, including a preparedness to view the “common sense” meanings of the very terms used as discursively constructed (McLaughlin, 1995). Second, researchers need to acknowledge the provisionality of their findings.

These ideas of discursive constructedness (Locke, 1004) and provisionality were introduced to teacher participants during the first round-table meeting. As part of the programme, the term “literature” was offered as an example of discursive contestation, and focus groups took place where primary, secondary and tertiary participants explored aspects of their understanding of the concept.<sup>3</sup> In the initial stages of the project, focus groups were used to explore participant understandings of both literature and cultural diversity/inclusiveness, with follow-up discussion in the project Wiki. However, the most important strategy used for the development of

<sup>3</sup> Twelve months into the project, the team agreed upon a definition of literature that served as a common, pragmatic understanding rather than final, absolute truth.



critical self-reflexivity was the reflective profile.

All participants, including university-based researchers, completed a reflective profile as a baseline data component. Teachers were offered a detailed template with a number of specific prompts under the following headings:

- Me and my students
- My view of English as a subject/how do I see such fundamental processes as “reading” and “writing”?
- Choosing “texts” for reading/viewing/listening
- The place of writing
- Pedagogy
- Classroom discourse or talk
- The place of technology

For the second of these, teachers were offered an heuristic map of subject English developed by Locke (2007) which offered a four-model view of the subject: cultural heritage, personal growth, textual and sub-textual skills and critical literacy. Teachers developed substantial documents in response to the template prompts. Here is just one extract from Teacher 1. It is a single paragraph from a dense, 13-page document:

*What aspects of a critical literacy view of English/literacy am I sympathetic to?*

I want students to be prepared to understand what is really happening in the world and that written and spoken words always come from a power-base. I want them to be able to make intelligent judgments from reading whatever they are presented with – the weather, body language, propaganda, etc. And then to be able to articulate with integrity and with control. I’d like to think that students leave school with the competence to understand what is presented to them and to be understood. Sometimes I tell students that reading is a life-skill because it involves reading more than just print. (Teacher 1: Profile)

Summing up the importance of the reflective profile to their transition to researchers, Teacher 2 is typical of the feelings of the group:

Completing the teacher profile was a crucial step I believe in me moving from being a teacher to one of a teacher researcher. This task required me to reflect on my practices and philosophy of teaching and this is something although I believe it is important, I struggle to find the time to make a priority. I do reflect on particular task’s effectiveness and ask my students to complete and end of unit/task evaluation but the wider and more personal in depth reflection that we were encouraged to do in our teacher profile asked me to dig deeper as a teacher. I felt it an immensely rewarding yet demanding experience having to question what sort of teacher I am, my approach to teaching reading and writing, why I choose certain texts, what my prior knowledge of my students were and how I knew this and questioning whether I was making a difference to my students’ learning. (Teacher 2: Reflection on research)

*Thinking of my students as research subjects*

During the first two phases of the project, the team began a collaborative literature review and addressed issues of baseline data collection. The form of the literature review was a cumulative annotated bibliography that was hosted as an “article” on the

project Wiki<sup>4</sup> that all members could contribute to. (To this end, teacher participants were introduced to APA referencing at the first round-table meeting.) In the early stages of the project, those of us leading it developed a detailed research template with the following components:

- **Step 1:** What kind of teacher am I and how could I be different?
- **Step 2:** Who are my students?
- **Step 3:** What are my students good at? Where are there gaps? (Use performance data).
- **Step 4:** Identify some specific learning objectives that emerge from the preceding steps.
- **Step 5:** Ascertain diagnostically what my students can do in relation to my chosen objectives
- **Step 6:** Designing learning tasks or activities to support objectives
- **Step 7:** Identify and collect data that would indicate that the nominated learning is occurring and in what degree.
- **Step 8:** Analysing my data

Each step was accompanied by a set of instructions and space for the insertion of data and write-up material.

All teachers in the project were familiar with such pedagogical principles as *assessment for learning*. However, the intense discussion that took place on such topics as cultural diversity sharpened their awareness of the need to know their students as “research subjects”. Even before the project commenced, they had addressed ethical issues related to their role as researchers. Now they began work collaboratively on designing data collection instruments that would enable them to ascertain such things as the literature-related practices and dispositions of their students and their abilities across a range of skills and understandings. Survey materials on such things as ethnicity and ICT usage were designed and shared by the teachers themselves (see Appendix 1). Teacher 2 wrote in relation to this task:

Participating in this research project gave me the opportunity to question and really drill down into what made my students tick when it came to reading. It became clear that certain assumptions teachers and educators make may not always hold true. I thought I knew my students well but there were elements of data I collected that certainly challenged some of my assumptions around their reading outside of school. (Teacher 2: Reflection on research)

One of the issues teachers had to grapple with in this early stage of the project were the limitations of nationally designed, diagnostic testing instruments currently in use in New Zealand.<sup>5</sup> They found themselves developing or adapting diagnostic assessment tools that reflected the skills and understandings they specifically wanted to encourage and which would reflect the way they planned to teach.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> [http://education.waikato.ac.nz/contracts/english/wiki/tiki-read\\_article.php?articleId=2](http://education.waikato.ac.nz/contracts/english/wiki/tiki-read_article.php?articleId=2)

<sup>5</sup> For example, AsTTle, which is a system of diagnostic testing for a range of competencies, including reading comprehension.

<sup>6</sup> See Whitehead, 2007 on ecological validity in respect of testing.

### *Developing a rationale for a change in practice*

The third phase of the project might be thought of as a link between the collection of baseline data and the design of what we (perhaps loosely) termed classroom “interventions”. On the basis of collaborative analysis of a range of baseline data, teachers developed a rationale for a change (not necessarily radical) in classroom practice. An example of a rationale is provided by Teacher 4, who had done a novel unit with her Year 9 class on *The Fatman* by Maurice Gee.<sup>7</sup> It was student critique of the “Fatman” character as stereotype and, in particular, a female student’s review comment that it was “dangerous to stereotype fat people in such a way” that led to her decision to develop a unit of work investigating stereotyping in fairy tales, through both actual fairy tales from a variety of cultural settings and through the film, *Shrek* (Adamson, 2001).

Put simply, interventions were justified in terms of the teacher-researcher’s reflective profile and an analysis of a range of student-related data (including performance data). At the core of this phase was the articulation of sets of learning objectives, which were linked to the discursive mapping of subject English referred to earlier. Here is an example of a set of objectives, developed by Teacher 2 for an elaborate unit aimed at developing her students’ enjoyment of literary texts:

1. Students are willing to reflect on their personal reading practices – what motivates them and what barriers they face in reading and enjoying texts.
2. Students are prepared to compare their own viewpoints towards ideas in texts to that of other young people from different cultural and religious settings.
3. Students can identify, discuss and support with evidence, the point of view and purpose of an author or director and their targeted audience.
4. Students are able to appreciate that there are issues and challenges characters in a text face; and enjoy writing a personal response around one of these issues using supporting evidence from the text.
5. Students are willing to reflect on personal responses to texts and discuss these with others orally or electronically.
6. Students are able to appreciate texts position readers/viewers to see things in a particular way.

As can be seen, these objectives position Teacher 2 as mainly working out of a “personal growth” frame, but also drawing on new critical and critical literacy discourses.

### *Designing an intervention*

In terms of the project, an intervention was thought of as a coherent set of tasks or activities aimed at meeting one or more objectives (as per Step 6 of the research template) and in some respects representing a departure from the teacher’s usual classroom practice. Practically, the focus was on the planning of one or more units of

---

<sup>7</sup> Maurice Gee is one of New Zealand most distinguished novelists and a writer of both adult and children’s fiction. *The fatman* won a major award after its publication, but was also attacked in the media for addressing “adult” themes in a book aimed at young adult readers. See <http://www.nzbookcouncil.org.nz/writers/geem.html>.

work, with more substantial units planned for the second year of the project.<sup>8</sup> An example of a task can be found in Teacher 3's intervention. She wanted her Year 12 students to be able to use one or both of a print journal and Web2.0 technologies to develop a personal and critical response to a complex fictional narrative (the film *Run Lola run* and the novel *5 people you meet in Heaven*), and reflect electronically through a shared class space, on their dreams and ambitions, how they may change over the year and what barriers they face to their fulfillment.

While teachers were responsible for the design of their interventions and writing them up in their research templates, a good deal of collaborative discussion occurred, both at round-table project meetings and informally via telephone and email. Teacher 2 recalled this aspect of the research process:

Working as a group designing interventions to meet the objectives we planned was another really important step in the process for me. It was the discussion I had with [Teacher 3] over her use of ICT that really encouraged me to go develop the on-line forum intervention. I did feel more confident on how to write a clear objective and what sort of strategies might be implemented to achieve this when working collaboratively. This discussion and sharing time was always positive and kept us focused. (Teacher 2: Reflection on research)

Teacher 2's intervention in the second year of the project was influenced by the work undertaken by Teacher 3 the previous year. Table 2 is a one-row excerpt from Teacher 2's unit overview grid, showing links between tasks, justification and objectives.

Sequence	Tasks/activities	Reason	Relevant objective(s)
Weeks 1 -10 x 1 period a week	<p><b>1. Encouraging wide reading and response</b></p> <p>Students given a collection of reading texts in hard copy and on electronic shared space to choose from</p> <p>Online/intranet class forum to discuss and respond to texts read</p> <p>Students keep log and summary</p>	<p>I hoped by tapping into technology I might be able to motivate students to read, reflect and be willing to share their own ideas and understand the ideas of others about texts.</p> <p>I wanted to incorporate time to read into this year's programme to reinforce its value since SSR is no longer timetabled.</p>	[Objs 1, 2]

**Table 2. Teacher 2: Unit planning excerpt**

*Deciding on and determining data to be collected*

As Table 1 indicates, teachers were introduced to the concept of "data" at the first project round-table meeting, when the range of potential data – questionnaires, semi-structured group interviews or focus groups, classroom observations, student work samples and test results – was indicated. Over the course of the project, university-based researchers worked closely with their classroom-based colleagues planning types of data to be collected and how much. In particular, we discussed the twin

<sup>8</sup> Our use of the concept of task was influenced by its use in second-language teaching. Corson (2001), for example, regards "a task is one activity set in the real world of the students that leads to some outcome that gives the task, and the language it involves, a meaning or significance in the world of the learner" (p. 139).

dangers of too much and too little data. Teacher 2 recalled: “We were able to swap surveys and questionnaires we had designed, offer advice on how to fine tune them and more importantly we had a chance to bounce ideas off each other and compare findings once we had implemented them with our students.” (Appendix 2 is an example of a post-intervention questionnaire designed by Teacher 3.)

Teachers were encouraged to schematize the relationship between data collection and relevant objective. Table 3 is a row-excerpt from Teacher 4’s tabular 2008 data-collection overview of her intervention, which included and developed out of a critical study of Khaled Hosseini’s novel *The kite runner* (2004). The particular objective referred to in the third column was “Students can develop narratives based on a different point of view from the text” and was related to the critical literacy focus of the unit, which invited students to contest texts by developing their own parallel or counter versions.

<b>Overall activity and specific tasks</b>	<b>Data: When to be collected (date)? How? By whom? etc.</b>	<b>Relevant objective</b>
<p>Chapter/story writing, based on Chapter X (new assessment created)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students have been experimenting with writing all year and have been collecting writing: essays, column writing, stories, etc. One writing day per week was established for a term as well as homework time. Finished writing activities have been collected.</li> </ol>	<p>Produce an extended piece of writing in a selected style. NCEA Level 3.</p> <p>One student used her experimental writing as a basis for a Level 3 Achievement Standard. We adapted NZQA tasks to create one for writing a chapter from a different perspective within the text.</p> <p>The writing experimentation was very worthwhile and students agonized over some styles before finding what they liked to do and what they did best. Eventually there were a range of writing styles produced:</p> <p>Two students opted to try writing from a different perspective, using <i>The kite runner</i>; three wrote short stories, one a beginning chapter using a news story as a trigger and four wrote columns. No grouping was confined to gender or culture. All students finished at least two pieces of writing before settling on assessment work and all of them experimented with different writing styles.</p> <p>Three students gained Excellence, four Merit and three Achieved.</p>	<p>4</p>

**Table 3. Teacher 4’s data collection scheme (excerpt)**

*Analysing data*

Overall, teachers found data analysis (Phase 5) the most challenging task in their journey towards becoming researchers in their own right. It was not a task that tended to take place collaboratively in the context of whole-group meetings. Rather, it occurred in dialogue between teachers and university researchers. Often the dialogue involved working together with the data; other times it involved the sharing back and forth (via email) of progressively refined versions of the analyses that were being conducted, both qualitative and quantitative. Modelling by university-based researchers was integral to the implementation of this task. Sometimes, the process led to supplementary data-gathering.

### *Writing up the research story*

At the beginning of this project, we had a sense that the ability of participating teachers to make the transition to teacher-researchers would stand or fall on their willingness to engage in the process as writers of their own research stories. Teachers of English/literacy are, of course, expected to be effective teachers and practitioners of writing. However, in New Zealand, as in other Anglophonic settings, the situation rather mocks this expectation. Writing lags behind reading in national test scores (Ministry of Education, 2007), writing often takes a back seat to reading in classroom programmes<sup>9</sup> and teachers themselves are often reluctant writers lacking in confidence.

From the start, teachers were encouraged to write in all sorts of settings: posting messages on the project Wiki; developing their reflective profiles; and engaging in the constant business of adding to and refining their research templates. From the start, also, those of us based in the university made it clear that joint publications in academic journals, which drew on teacher writing and teacher research, would have the teacher's name first.<sup>10</sup> At the beginning of 2008, we made it clear to participating teachers that we would like them all to produce a final report (Phase 6) and that we would help them in any way we could. Again, in order to facilitate this process we offered them a final report-writing template, loosely modeled on the typical structure of a research article but with narrative elements. The headings were as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Reflecting on my own practice
3. The teaching and learning context or My class
4. Trying something new
5. What emerged? or Findings
6. Discussion and conclusion

By the end of the project, all secondary teachers and one primary teacher had produced final reports ranging in length from 14 to 59 pages (including appendices). The other two primary teachers had fed material in chunks to university-based colleagues, who then worked it into the final report project. The project produced a substantial report (Locke *et al.*, 2008) which truly was a “multi-vocal” account, even though as project director I took overall responsibility for the mosaic. In a section of the final report dealing with “Contribution to building research and practice capability”, the report itself is described as follows:

It is a stitching together (or bricollage) and refining of a large number of text extracts written by all members of the project team, sometimes sitting together in front of computer screens, sometimes via the passing to and fro of email attachments that went through countless versions before settling as “final” individual teacher accounts, or as self-contained texts for inclusion in this report. In a true sense, this report is

---

<sup>9</sup> The project report, significantly, indicated that the range of interventions trialed was heavily weighted towards reading. Teacher 4 was the only teacher that might be described as having a balanced reading/writing programme.

<sup>10</sup> For an example, see Sturges, J. & Locke, T. (In press). Beyond *Shrek*: Fairytale magic in the multicultural classroom. *Cambridge Journal of Education*.

multi-authorial (Locke *et al.*, 2008, p. 193).

In this fashion, I would like to think, the final report (as text), together with the teachers' own reports, were vehicles for self-representation and not agencies through which teachers, yet again, became spoken for (cf Goodson, 1999).

## CONCLUSION

In a questionnaire given to secondary teachers after the conclusion of the project they were asked to tick the statement from the following group that best described how they felt about themselves as transitioning from teacher to researcher:

- I feel I have made the transition from teacher to teacher researcher
- I feel I have made excellent progress in making the transition from teacher to teacher researcher
- I feel I have made good progress in making the transition from teacher to teacher researcher
- I feel I have made some progress in making the transition from teacher to teacher researcher
- I feel I have made no progress in making the transition from teacher to teacher researcher

Three felt that they had made excellent progress and one felt their progress had been good. Of the three, one had completed a thesis at Masters level as part of the project and another had started Masters study and is currently looking ahead to the undertaking of a thesis. (The other two both had Masters degrees.)

In the same questionnaire, secondary teachers were asked to tick their description of how helpful a particular aspect of the research induction process was in respect of their making the transition from teacher to teacher-researcher. Table 4 maps the results:

Aspect	Vital	Very helpful	Quite helpful	A little helpful	Not really helpful
The research overview documents given out on the first day	2		2		
Completing the teacher profile	1	2	1		
Engaging in focus groups	2	2			
Being able to work with a research template	3		1		
Working collaboratively to design interventions in relation to objectives	1	3			
Planning together ways of collecting data and relevance of data collected	2	2			

Working with Terry or other members of the team on analyzing data	3	1			
Being given a template for writing a final report	2	2			
Actually having to write a final report	1	1	1	1	

**Table 4. Helpful aspects in the transition from teacher to teacher-researcher**

This was a small project in terms of the number of personnel involved. Nevertheless, the responses here in broad terms match my observations and to some extent mirror our intentions and practices as project leaders.

In an earlier note, I suggested a parallel between the transition to a role of teacher researcher and Morgan and Saxton’s (1987) taxonomy of personal engagement for participants in the drama-in-education situation – interest, engagement, commitment, internalization, interpretation and evaluation (p. 22). I can speculate that the research overview given at the first round-table meeting generated interest, but that engagement needed something far more involving, such as completing the teacher profiles and engaging in process groups. The general endorsement of these as at least “very helpful” was a moderate surprise to me. However, I suspect that the way these were set up formally communicated to teachers the strong sense of being research participants. Only one teacher found the use of the research template as less that vital to the induction process. (She commented on her somewhat lukewarm response: “You know what I am like trying to follow a plan!!!!”)

The next three aspects of the process – all based in some form of collaboration – were positively endorsed by these teachers. Many comments made by them retrospectively emphasised the way they valued the chance to engage intensely and purposefully in focused and professional dialogue. It was clearly something they missed in their workaday lives.

The writing template was also strongly endorsed. As someone who worked intensely with these teachers over two years, however, I was fascinated by the spread of responses to the expectation that they write a final report. As I see it, the response to this question is an indicator of the extent to which the role of teacher-researcher has indeed become internalized. It is, I think, possible for a teacher to be committed to the role of researcher without this internalisation. Those of us who are researchers know how hard the writing process is and yet how central it is to the process of turning our data into compelling, coherent and trustworthy explicatory stories. The attitude to writing, as I reflect on all of this, was the key indicator that a transition was being made. It was in this act of writing that teachers found their voices as teacher-researchers, and this step had to be taken before they could move up the taxonomical scale and become interpreters of their research in their own right. In this respect, I find myself concurring with the teachers’ own view of their journey. Three, I think, actually made the transition (though they chose to call this “excellent progress”) while one remained at the level of commitment for the duration of the project.

This presentation began with a discussion of a change in policy in TLRI, which



occurred in response to evidence that the scheme, as first proposed, underestimated what it takes for teachers to become researchers in their own right. In this presentation, I have reflected on the factors that I believe contributed positively to the induction of the majority of the project's participating teachers as teacher-researchers. Most teachers, at least among secondary participants, made the transition – and knew they had done so. I would like to leave the final word to Teacher 2, who expressed this awareness in these words:

Being involved in this intervention project meant I needed to make time to survey closely a particular group of students on their reading and learning styles (not just the usual diagnostic data we collect as a department), develop and experiment with new teaching strategies and closely reflect on own my teaching practice. I have always considered myself to be a fairly reflective teacher, knowledgeable about my students' backgrounds and willing to try new things. The TLRI project, however, made me realise that in recent years I have not always made these aspects a priority in my teaching practice. As an HOD there never seems to be enough time in the day as NCEA requirements, curriculum changes, administration and managing staff have tended to take over. Working on the project has reminded me how valuable these tools can be when attempting to motivate and improve student learning. (Teacher 2: Final report)

## REFERENCES

- Adamson, A. (Dir.) (2001). *Shrek*. Glendale, CA: Dream Works Animation.
- Berger, J., & Baker, R. (2008). Developing new knowledge and practice through teacher-researcher partnerships? Paper presented at the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI), Auckland, January 6-9, 2008. Retrieved June 3, 2009 from <http://www.tlri.org.nz/pdfs/discussion-paper-pdfs/developing-new-knowledge.pdf>.
- Burns, R. (1994). *Introduction to research methods*. Melbourne: Longman.
- Cleary, A. (2008). *Keeping up with the "digital natives": Integrating Web 2.0 technologies into classroom practice*. Master's thesis, University of Waikato, 2008.
- Corson, D. (2001). *Language diversity and education*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Fetterman, D. (1998). *Ethnography: Step by step* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage.
- Gee, M. (2000). *The Fatman*. Auckland: Puffin.
- Gilmore, A. (2007). *Review of the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative*. Report to the TLRI Steering Committee, New Zealand Council for Educational Research. Christchurch: Unit for Studies in Educational Evaluation, College of Education, University of Canterbury.
- Goodson, I. (1999). Representing teachers. In M. Hammersley (Ed.), *Researching school experience: Ethnographic studies of teaching and learning* (pp. 122-133). London and New York: Falmer Press.
- Hosseini, K. (2004). *The kite runner*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (Eds.). (1988). *The action research planner*. Geelong: Deakin University.
- Kincheloe, J. & McLaren, P. (1994). Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*

- (pp. 138-157). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lytle, S., & Cochran-Smith, M. (1992). Teacher research as a way of knowing. *Harvard Educational Review*, 62 (4), 447-474.
- Locke, T. (2004). *Critical discourse analysis*. London: Continuum.
- Locke, T. (2007). *Resisting qualifications reforms in New Zealand: The English Study Design as constructive dissent*. Rotterdam/Taipei: Sense Publishers.
- Locke, T., Cawkwell, G., Sila'ila'i, E., Cleary, A., de Beer, W., Harris, S., Lumby, E., Riley, D., Struggess, J., & Thumath, J. (2008). *Teaching literature in the multicultural classroom*. Report commissioned by New Zealand Council for Educational Research. Hamilton: Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research (WMIER), School of Education, University of Waikato.
- Loughran, J. (Ed.) (1999). *Researching teaching: Methodologies and practices for understanding pedagogy*. London: Falmer Press.
- McLaughlin, T. (1995). Introduction. In F. Lentricchia & T. McLaughlin (Eds.), *Critical terms for literary study* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (pp. 1-8). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ministry of Education (2007). *Boys' achievement: A Ssnthesis of the data*. Wellington: Learning Policy Frameworks.
- McNiff, J. (with Whitehead, J). (2002). *Action research: Principles and practice* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Morgan, N., & Saxton, J. *Teaching drama: A mind of many wonders*. London: Hutchinson.
- Schon, D. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.
- Somekh, B. (2009). Agency through action research: Constructing active identities from theoretical models and metaphors. In S. Noffke & B. Somekh (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of educational action research* (pp. 370-380). London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Sturgess, J. & Locke, T. (In press). Beyond *Shrek*: Fairytale magic in the multicultural classroom. *Cambridge Journal of Education*.
- Teaching and Learning Research Initiative. (2003). Wellington: TLRI.
- Teaching and Learning Research Initiative. (2003, revised 2008). Wellington: TLRI. Retrieved from: <http://www.tlri.org.nz/pdfs/overview-2008.pdf>.
- Teaching and Learning Research Initiative. (2009). *Expression of interest 2009*. Wellington: TLRI.
- Whitehead, D. (2007). Literacy assessment practices: Moving from standardised to ecologically valid assessment in secondary schools. *Language and Education*, 21(5), 1-20.
- Yin, R. (1989). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage.

## Appendix 1: Teacher-developed ethnicity questionnaire

Name

### Baseline data questionnaire

Please tick the ethnic backgrounds you identify with. You can pick more than one.

Samoan	Tongan
Niuean	Cook Island
Maori	Fijian
European	Indian
Chinese	
Other ( <i>please write what other</i> )	

Now rank these (1 being the ethnicity that you most identify with)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Write down what languages are spoken at home by your **family** members.

Write down what languages **you** can speak fluently.

Write down the languages **you** also feel confident in reading and writing.

Write down what languages **you** can understand but not speak.

Write down what languages **you** can understand a few words of.

**Thank you for your time**

## Appendix 2

### 13 Popular Culture : Student Survey

#### Name (optional)

This is the first time we have offered this course at Kiwi College. I'd like some feedback on course content and delivery. Please answer honestly.

#### Theme 1: Discrimination

1. In this question I would like to find out what you thought of the texts we studied for this theme. For each of the texts listed, tick the column that BEST shows your opinion.

Name of text	Really enjoyed it. Choice!	It was quite good.	I didn't mind it.	Didn't especially like it.	I really disliked it.
North Country					
The Hurricane					
Brotown (script and TV)					
White Comedy					
The Hurricane (song)					

For one of the text you really enjoyed, give TWO reasons:

**First:**

**Second:**

#### Theme 2: Technology – playing God?

2. In this question I would like to find out what you thought of the texts we studied this year. For each of the texts listed, tick the column that BEST shows your opinion.

Name of text	Really enjoyed it. Choice!	It was quite good.	I didn't mind it.	Didn't especially like it.	I really disliked it.
Frankenstein (1984)					
The Island					

Frankenstein (extracts)					
Pig Heart Boy (Novel)					
Cellular Memory (article)					
Te Manawa (The Heart)					

**For one of the text you really enjoyed, give TWO reasons:**

**First:**

**Second:**

3. In this question I would like to find out what class activities you enjoyed doing in the course. For each of the activities listed, tick the column that BEST shows your opinion.

<b>Teaching /Learning Task</b>	Really enjoyed it. Choice!	It was quite good.	I didn't mind it.	Didn't especially like it.	I really disliked it.
Teacher directed eg notes					
Co-operative learning activities					
Individual inquiry research tasks eg Theme Study					
ICT activities eg powerpoint presentation					
Group discussion					
Oral presentations					

4. 6 of you chose the optional assessment 'Oral Presentation'. Please state why or why not you chose to do this extra assessment task.

5. How would you view your overall progress and achievement in English this year?
7. What does a critical literacy approach mean to you?
8. What sorts of things do you learn by approaching texts the "crit lit" (short for critical literacy) way?
9. Have you enjoyed using a "crit lit" approach when studying various texts?  
Say why or why not?