



## Action Research : research methodology based on field activities

Summary of Jack Whitehead's Lecture to the 6th Japan Academy of Diabetes Education  
on the 15th September 2001.

I want to thank the organisers of the conference for giving me this opportunity to talk with you today about the methodologies of action research based on field activities. My last trip to Japan was in December last year when I had the pleasure of working with colleagues from Kobe University and Akashi School on the development of action research approaches to the professional development of teachers. I am delighted to be here to share ideas on ways in which action research may be of use to your work as nurses, nutritionists and medical doctors in the field of Diabetes Education.

Most of my own work is freely available on the web at [actionresearch.net](http://actionresearch.net). You will see that my ideas have developed mainly through my action research studies of my own practice as a knowledge-creator and university teacher. The practitioner-researchers whose work I have supervised are in the living theory section of [actionresearch.net](http://actionresearch.net). This work has also been very influential in the development of the following ideas on the methodologies of action research, based on field activities.

At the start of my lecture I want to be clear that in understanding the methodologies of action research, it is important to put them **in the context of the knowledge you embody in your own professional practices as nurses, nutritionists and medical doctors.** In this room there is a very impressive body of knowledge, which you carry with you into your everyday practice. This is your embodied knowledge. This embodied knowledge is likely to be what is called 'tacit' knowledge. I mean this in the sense that you have yet to research your own practice and to make your knowledge public in ways that can be shared and added to the knowledge-base of your profession.

I am making the assumption that everyone in this room shares a desire to improve the quality of Diabetes Education. I take it that this is why we are here. I think that everyone will be asking themselves questions of the kind, **'How do I improve what I am doing?'** My own contribution to the conference is to share an action research methodology which was specifically created to research questions where individuals and groups are asking themselves and each other on how to improve their contribution to Diabetes Education.

What I understand by 'methodology' is the system of methods and principles, which make up a discipline. Here is an outline of a system of methods, which you could focus on your desire to improve your practice and your capacities as knowledge-creators in making contributions to knowledge of Diabetes Education.

**RESEARCHING QUESTIONS OF THE KIND  
'HOW DO I IMPROVE WHAT I AM DOING?'**

**1) Using Action-reflection Cycles As A Method of Improving Practice and Answering your Questions :**

- i) What do I want to improve?**
- ii) How am I going to improve it?**
- iii) As I act, what data am I going to collect to help me to make a judgement on my effectiveness?**
- iv) Evaluating my effectiveness.**
- v) Modifying what I want to improve, modifying my plan and my actions in response to my evaluations.**
- vi) Producing a description and explanation for my own professional learning and testing the validity of my explanation.**

**(See McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, (1996) You and Your Action Research Project. London ; Routledge)**

**Data for point 1.iii can include material on :**

- \* prior professional development ;
- \* influence on a patient's diabetes education ;
- \* responses to your care which shows their learning ;
- \* contributions to policy on diabetes education ;
- \* autobiographical accounts which reveal professional values and commitments ;
- \* action plans ;
- \* professional activities which can be used as evidence in a description and explanation of your professional learning ;
- \* your professional reading ;

- \* critical engagement with relevant research ;
- \* application of research evidence in your professional practice ;
- \* video–tapes and other visual and audio records of your professional practices ;
- \* evaluations of the influence of you actions in terms of values, skills and understanding ;
- \* new action plans which show a modification of concerns, action plans and actions in the light of your evaluations on your effectiveness ;
- \* evaluations from colleagues which show how you have validated your claims to understand your professional learning as you work at influencing your patients learning and health care ;
- \* evidence from another colleague’s portfolio which shows how you are influencing their professional development in the process of helping patients and/or colleagues to improve their learning ;
- \* creative use of a variety of media for sharing your stories of your professional life and influence in diabetes education.

**For point 1. vi – Methods of Constructing Descriptions and Explanations of your own Learning in your Personal CV Assessments of your Effectiveness.**

See the portfolio assessment items in the masters section of [actionresearch.net](http://actionresearch.net)

See the portfolios of the Knowledge Media Laboratory of the Carnegie Foundation Website at : [http : //kml2.carnegiefoundation.org/gallery/index.html](http://kml2.carnegiefoundation.org/gallery/index.html)

**For point 1. vi – Methods of Testing the Validity of your Accounts of your Learning Through Questions of the Kind :**

*Is my account comprehensible to others?*

*Have I produced sufficient evidence to justify a claim to know my influence on my own learning and the learning of others in Diabetes Education?*

*Have I clarified the meanings of my embodied values in my enquiry ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’*

*Have I sustained my commitment to improving my practice through time?*

I want to emphasise the importance **of a group of colleagues working together as a ‘Validation Group’** as they help you to strengthen your professional knowledge–base and to take your enquiry forward through sharing ideas on how you might improve your practice.

**For point 1. vi Methods of Integrating Research Results from Other Sources into your Professional Practice of Diabetes Education.**

I will draw on the masters degree of Jekan Adler– Collins to show how research results can be integrated in professional practice in health education. For a summary of the degree see :

[http : //www.bath.ac.uk/~edsajw/jekan.shtml](http://www.bath.ac.uk/~edsajw/jekan.shtml)

**2) Methods of Engaging with Power Relations which Influence Change in your Organisation.**

All of our professional practice can be understood to exist within a network of power relations. If we are to improve what we are doing it is important to understand the nature of these power relations. It is also important to develop our methods of engaging with power relations so that we can use them to support and improve our professional practice.

I will draw on the doctoral action research of Jackie Delong, a Superintendent of Schools in the Grand Erie District Board in Ontario, to show **how an action research approach to professional development can be integrated within a 'system'**, through influencing policy formation, the financing of its implementation and its evaluation.

**3) Methods of Publishing your Contribution to your Professional Knowledge–base of Diabetes Education.**

I will focus on the importance of 'acting locally' and 'publishing globally' in :

- i) Text–based professional and academic journals.
- ii) Electronic publishing of text and image–based research.

See :

The Ontario Action Researcher at [http : //www.unipissing.ca/oar/index.htm](http://www.unipissing.ca/oar/index.htm)

The Journal of Interactive Media in Education at [http : //www–jime.open.ac.uk/](http://www-jime.open.ac.uk/)

The Image and Identity Research Collective at [http : //www.iirc.mcgill.ca/](http://www.iirc.mcgill.ca/).