

# **How can I encourage practitioners to make use of action research?**

**(R.S. Punia, October 2009)**

## **Abstract**

My experience has shown that currently only a small numbers of individuals and organisations with intrinsic motivation use action research to improve themselves and their work. These self-empowered people are not made: They make themselves. Generally policy makers, educators, and practitioners show mild interest in this methodology. I hope to influence these people to take an active part in action research on a large scale.

It is difficult to offer a simple definition of action research because it is an evolving methodology with many forms. Basically action research is self-study of action to improve practice, practitioner and professional knowledge as an integrated process. Drawing mainly on my personal professional experience as an international educator for forty years detailed in Punia (2004) validated in selected professional literature I make a case for the active use of action research for personal and social empowerment to cope with the rapidly changing and uncertain world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The focus of the paper is to tease out the problems and promises in the use of action research in its various forms in my professional learning and influencing the learning of others and to make suggestions for its future development. The theoretical frameworks used in this paper are based on a dialectical relationship between theory and practice and between the I/self and the universal Self as oneness of the universe to generate self-knowledge. It would seem that most of the problems and promises originate from poor understanding of theory/practice and individual self/universal relationship. My thinking is largely influenced by the work of Jack Whitehead of the university of Bath and the work of Stephen Covey.

My experience shows that the best way to explore the potential of this methodology is to do it in small ways. Action research is just a systematic approach to learning from what we do at work and at home to generate knowledge to empower ourselves and to share this knowledge with others to improve the quality of life on our planet. Gradually action research becomes a life of inquiry and thoughtful action but it has the potential for far reaching effects on individuals and organisations.

**Key words:** Action learning, action research, living educational form of action research, personal values, Universal principles, personal self/I, Universal self, curriculum, professionalism in organisations, owning and contextualising.

## **Introduction**

I first introduce myself for better understanding of my thoughts and actions expressed in this paper. I had early general educational in India, formal technical education, practical experience, teacher education and teaching experience in the UK. My international experience as a professional educator includes India, UK, Singapore, Hong Kong, Fiji, Western Samoa and Mauritius. I am both a practitioner engaged in taking action and an academic engaged in generating knowledge with doctorate in education, but, I remain more of a practitioner and less of an academic and my writings and works are mostly for practitioners engaged in creating learning spaces for themselves and for others. DR Jack Whitehead of the University of Bath department of education calls them professional educators who are practitioners and academics. However, educators in education remain divided into academics and practitioners. Usually academics work in universities generating and teaching new knowledge while practitioners take action in real settings to solve problems using many forms of personal and academic knowledge.

I believe that academics and practitioners are capable of solving human problems but they rarely work together because of marked differences in their values and work cultures. I believe much work remains to be done to reconcile these differences to promote further collaboration amongst academics and practitioners. Action research provides a useful context for them to work together for personal and social good.

I am a chartered Builder who became an educator after teaching construction technology, economics and management in the H/E sector of Education in the UK. My academic qualifications in education include certificate, Diploma, MA, MPhil and Doctorate in Education. As a professional educator in vocational and technical education my professional experience includes teaching construction technology, economics and management in two polytechnics, teacher education in a college of education and consultancy/advisory role in curriculum, staff and institute development in vocational education and training in several developing countries.

During my professional career I began with action learning (learning from what I was doing) to acquire personal knowledge. Action learning became action research when I began to validate my learning with my colleagues and later with academics from Universities. I used action learning in many forms without naming and framing it. Few universities in the UK valued action research and personal practical knowledge for making higher academic awards.

Now this situation has changed. Practitioners in the UK have the opportunity to improve themselves, their work and obtain academic qualifications, but only a few make use of this opportunity. This is particularly true of practitioners in developing countries. It is gratifying to know now UN aid agencies are encouraging developing countries to generate their own knowledge to develop sustainable solutions. Action research is the appropriate methodology to meet this call. Now many British universities offer special higher academic awards at Master and Doctorate levels to produce professional educators needed to promote learning organisations and learning societies for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This paper is particularly addressed to developing countries mostly using knowledge borrowed from other cultures.

Currently I am engaged in encouraging and supporting individuals and organisations to undertake action research for their personal, social good and for the sustained development of humanity at large. In this paper I offer accounts of my personal experience of learning action research sprinkled with professional literature. I believe my personal experience may speak louder than what Professional literature says to practitioners aspiring to become better practitioners, academics aspiring to understand the practical theories of practitioners.

I open this paper with my first encounter with the value differences amongst academics and practitioners because these differences still persist. Next, I introduce selected professional literature to show that action research has many forms. My personal experience of learning action research forms the large part of this paper. I have briefly drawn attention to a few unresolved issues and unexplored potential of action research. The paper closes with a summary and with my recent experience of introducing action research to a mixed group of academics and practitioners in a developing country.

The following story raises several issues, but my aim is to draw reader's attention to value differences amongst practitioners and academics and towards action research with potential to reconcile these differences to work together for the common good of our planet.

### **1. My First Experience of the Value Differences amongst Academics and Practitioner**

**This authentic story occurred in a British University in 1983 in the department of education. I had registered myself for PhD as a part-time student while working as a consultant overseas. I was visiting my supervisor for a short stay. One day there was a departmental meeting to discuss a research proposal for studying the way teachers matched student work assignments to their abilities. My supervisor invited me to join this discussion group. I knew and respected the people in the group. They had different disciplinary backgrounds and interests. To my surprise there was no general agreement amongst them on how this topic might be researched. More importantly to me, they seemed to ridicule each other's ideas in spite of chairman's restraints. Every one had a staunch allegiance to his/her discipline and his/her position in the department. Sociologists, psychologists and historians etc. insisted that their methodology was the most appropriate one.**

When all of them had finished their arguments they asked me how I would tackle this problem. As a practitioner I replied that usually I advise my student teachers to use at least three classroom assignments during their class work: a difficult one to match the high ability students, an appropriate one to match the ability of the majority of the class and an easy one to match the ability of the low ability students. This way they would be able to involve the entire group in learning according to their ability level and they would avoid class discipline problems for the teacher. All of them stared at me without saying anything. I believe that they refused to accept my practical experience as valid professional knowledge because my knowledge failed to fit their disciplinary knowledge and values. I later learnt that they conducted this study by studying teacher behaviour and the findings were not very different from my practical knowledge.

As I understand academics tend to use rational approaches of their disciplines to produce generalisations, whereas the practitioners working in various contexts use professional judgement in making use of a variety of knowledge to get work done to the satisfaction of various stakeholders. No wonder we had difficulty in understanding each other's perspective in the above incident. We failed to appreciate the value differences amongst practitioners and academics.

At that time academics were mostly engaged in research useful for policy makers and to obtain government grants to carry on their work. Few researchers seemed to be interested in studying 'Teachers' Thinking' and their work. 'Research on Teachers Thinking' had just commenced in USA. My supervisor and I were the only two amongst this group with interest in this new area of research. Nobody, in that group, including my supervisor, was aware of action research.

It is not my intention to criticise anyone involved in this story. I knew all the people involved in the above episode and had great respect for each one of them. I aim to celebrate the fact that we have learnt much in educational research since that incident in the eighties when 'Research on Teacher Behaviour' was popular. Now action research, integrating teacher actions, thoughts, values, and beliefs is available to us with potential to improve practice and practitioners. The cornerstone of this form of action research is collaboration amongst academics and practitioners.

Human action requires many different forms of knowledge and methods of knowing. Together they become a seamless epistemology of knowledge. I believe in the above episode the academics did not value personal practical knowledge because they failed to appreciate the nature of action fully. Now action researchers in universities are beginning to make up this deficiency. For instance, McNiff and Whitehead (2000) wrote: "*The knowledge, the practice, is a synthesis of different kinds of knowledge and different ways of knowing. No one is freestanding or more important; they are independent and complementary. Together they provide personal theories of practice*" (McNiff & Whitehead, 2000, p.52). The following quotation captures important features of action:

**Change is difficult because it is riddled with dilemmas, ambivalences and paradoxes. It combines steps that simply do not go together: to have a clear vision and to be open minded; to take initiative and to empower others; to provide support and pressure; to start small and think big; to expect results and be patient and persistent; to have a plan and be flexible; to use top-down and bottom up strategies; to experience uncertainty and satisfaction. Educational change is above all a very personal experience in a social, but, often in impersonal setting (Fullan & Stiegelbauer 1991, p.350)**

I believe we still do not understand the nature of human action and human learning fully. Together with action research as a new comer we need all the traditional strategies of

teaching, learning and producing knowledge. Action research integrates these to form a new methodology with better potential to cope with our current global problems. Human action occurs for various purposes and contexts. Consequently action learning and action research has many forms producing various forms of knowledge. The following literature I studied shows gradual development of action research from its use in planned action used to solve defined problems to the study of processes in solving problems difficult to define in advance.

## **2. Various Conceptions of Action Research**

For (Grundy, 1987, P.115), '*Action research includes plan, act, observe and reflect cycle*'. Since then action research has evolved from the study of planned action to include the study of unplanned action. According to (Elliott 1991), "*Practice is the form of inquiry: a hypothetical probe into the unknown beyond one's present understanding. The search for understanding is carried out through changing the practice and not in advance of such changes*" (P. 24). For many action researchers action precedes thought for others there is no separation of inquiry from practice.

As action occurs for various purposes in various contexts, action researchers tend to develop their own methodologies. That is why Action researchers in universities and in professional literature tend to speak of their own brand of action research only. It made it very difficult for me to understand the nature of action research as a beginner. In the next paragraph I introduce the professional literature I studied and found useful to validate my practical experience.

I found that although Action learning and Action research originated from academic traditions such as Lewin, (1946), Argyris & Schon (1978,), Revans, (1971), Kemiss et al (1983) many other academics and practitioners have conceptualised and used it differently in different contexts. The following list presents the conceptions of the recent writers.

- Whitehead is well known for his living educational theory form of action research. According to him tensions in personal values and actions is a source of learning (Whitehead, 1989, 1994 & 1999).
- Stenhouse integrated curriculum development with teacher development emphasising the need for teachers to do their own research to improve themselves and their work. Elliot (1991) developed this idea into action research useful to improve the quality of classroom teaching and professional knowledge (Stenhouse, 1975 & Elliott, 1991). Elliott (1998) extended the use of action research in curriculum development as a social experiment.

- Schon is known for reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action to generate practical knowledge. According to him thoughtful action initiates reflection (Schon, 1986).
- According to (Lomax, 1989) action research is action science, which seeks to inform action through articulated experience of prior action
- It is concerned with a systematic approach to tease out the differences in espoused theories and theories in action of practitioners.
- According to (Zuber-Skerritt, 1991) action research is useful approach to promote critical attitude, accountability, self-evaluation and professionalism in teaching.
- According to (Winter, 2003) action research is a specific form of inquiry appropriate for working with people to help them to learn from their situation
- According to (Holly, 1991) action Research is research for action, in action and of action in the context of school as centre of inquiry. I found this work very useful to validate my past experiences of action research as a consultant in curriculum, staff and school development.
- According to (Parks 1999& Reason, 1999) action research involves generation and integration of functional, interpretative, relational and reflective forms of knowledge to produce practical knowledge
- According to Torbert (1999) action research involves learning from experience including organising, interpersonal speaking, listening with personal awareness. For me this work provides example of action research in practical situations using professional dialogue as a new epistemology (Punia, 2004).
- Eames inquired into the form of knowledge useful in teaching. Action research creates dialectical form of knowledge appropriate for teaching.
- McNiff (1993) considers teaching as Learning. This book is useful for those who wish to understand action research in the context of teaching.
- Reason (2006) sees it living as a life of inquiry for personal and social good.
- Living educational theory form of Action Research is useful to create self-knowledge to understand the nature of I/self (Punia, 2004).

- According to Passfield (1996) action Learning is a paradigm whose time has come in education. He sees cultural change in education through action research.
- According to Punia (2004) 'Living educational theory form of action research' is embedded in professional dialogue amongst professionals engaged in solving intricate problems of life
- According to (Norman, 1999) action is a designery mode of Inquiry used to solve wicked problems (problems difficult to define in advance

Now we have a vast literature and several professional journals on action research. Holly (1991) also provides several examples of action research and its historical growth in The UK and USA. For academic awards from Universities action research is supervised/facilitated by academics. Winter (2000) provides a university facilitator's perspective of action research as follows.

**Action research is a specific form of inquiry appropriate for working with people to help them to learn their situation in order to change it. Its methods for developing knowledge and achieving validity are those of diplomatic and caring communication between equals. Its knowledge claims are based on what is successfully shared and acted upon. Its validity claims are based on what has been agreed by the participants to be trustworthy (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Change is for the better. Its generalisability claims are based on what underlying pattern of events and meanings from specific situation others can translate into their situations and learn from it (Winter 2000, p. 142).**

Some academics have categorised various forms of action research. For instance, **The Journal for Managerial and Organisational learning, Volume 30, No. 2, June, 1999** is devoted entirely to articles on action research in management. It categorised these articles into action research, participatory research, action learning, action science, developmental inquiry and cooperative inquiry on the basis of action methods and action strategy used by the various authors of the articles. I found these academic distinctions unhelpful in understanding the real nature of action research, which is to generate knowledge from and for practice. I found Schon, (1995) introducing action research succinctly as follows: "*We should think about practice as a setting not only for the application of knowledge but for its generation. We should ask not only how practitioners can better apply the results of academic research, but what kind of knowing are already embedded in competent practice*"(Schon, 1995, p.29). In the following section I present my own experience of learning action research.

## **My Experience of Learning Action Research**

Mostly I learnt action research by reflecting-in-action and reflecting-on-action, the terms Schon introduced. My practical knowledge presented below shows that action learning and action research are not new and they can be practiced at various levels of sophistication. In fact most people generate personal knowledge mostly based on 'common sense consciousness' but we do not develop 'discursive consciousness' (Elliott, 1998) of our knowledge, which remains implicit and personal. Action research makes implicit knowledge explicit to share it with others. This is one of the major benefits of action research.

I began to experiment with action research due to my enquiring mind and intrinsic motivation to learn from personal experience. It later developed into learning to improve my practice and my professional knowledge to enhance my professional career and to make contribution towards social good. Supportive teaching-learning contexts provided the space for it to flourish. Supportive contexts provided me with opportunities to improve my self and what I was doing for common good and valued my contributions.

My experience has shown that Action research needs both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. It takes two to make a success of action learning and action research: a self-motivated individual and a supportive organisation. I believe that fuller understanding of motivation required to undertake action research remains an important research issue for its future development. Furthermore, the cornerstone of action research is reflective thinking but my personal experience and literature has shown that all practitioners are not reflective thinkers. It is important for the reader to understand the particular nature of the context of my professional work overseas.

A large part of my professional life was spent working in developing countries where Unlike UK, education ministries and departments were not top heavy due to lack of experienced educators and funds. The developing countries made up this deficiency through aid from developed countries. I found it a blessing in disguise in spite of the fact that some educators in developing countries did not share my thinking. Teachers, particularly self-motivated people at grass root level had the opportunity to improve themselves and their work together with experienced advisors/facilitators without too many constraints from the top. My professional work as an international educator described later provided evidence to validate my belief.

At home in the UK we have different context. In my view in the UK self-motivated educators at classroom level are excessively governed from the top and constrained with unnecessary rules and regulations tending to strangle personal initiatives. We seem to believe that



improvement comes through spending more money on establishing new systems and management control of teachers. We have forgotten that change comes largely through people, not from better systems and managers of these systems. My professional experience has shown to me that improvement occurs through the initiatives of thoughtful educators and supportive contexts.

In the early days of my career, like other thoughtful practitioners, I intuitively used reflective thinking to produce personal practical knowledge in the form of professional insights from perceptual learning, routines, narratives of cases and critical incidents. Insights produced high quality professional knowledge from sudden flashes of integration of all forms of knowledge including embodied, mental and spiritual knowledge. Few educators understand the nature of insights. Heggarty (2000) draws attention towards the importance of insights in teaching. Insights are very useful and valid forms of personal knowledge but these are difficult to share with others without rational explanations and validation in other forms of theoretical and practical knowledge.

Later I began to translate personal insights into professional knowledge after due validation with the available professional literature and practitioners. This form of action learning proved useful to me to improve practice, my professional knowledge and to share it with other practitioners. Many years later I learnt that academics in universities had formalised action learning into a systematic approach to improve practice and to generate professional knowledge using reflections-in-action and reflections-on-actions (Schon 1995).

Professional literature tends to use the terms action learning and action research indiscriminately (Passfield, 1996). However, I regard my early personal experiences of action research as action learning and my later experience at the university of Bath duly validated by the academics to make academic awards as action research. **I believe action research involves practitioners and academics working together to influence and being influenced from each other and to produce explicit professional knowledge.**

My EdD thesis (Punia 2004) includes examples of my early experiences and the latest experience of action learning and action research in various chapters of the thesis. This thesis called: **“My CV is my Curriculum: The making of an international educator with spiritual values”** includes ample evidence to support the narrative of this paper with additional material. See (<http://www.actionresearch.net/punia.shtml>)

This thesis used living educational theory form of action research. According to Whitehead (1989,2008,2009) of the University of Bath the accounts of professional educators of their personal learning and their influences on the learning of others are their living educational theories and it is a distinctive form of action research answering the question: how do I improve my practice? My EdD thesis is an example of this form of action research. It presents my professional learning and influences on the learning of others for over 40 years as a professional educator in many contexts. It is a self-study used to produce self-knowledge i.e. the knowledge of my professional (I)/self in answering the question how do I improve what I am doing. It includes my technical competence and my self/I including my values, interests, needs and philosophy of life as embodied standards of my professional judgement. I used reflections-on-actions in my CV as the curriculum of my learning career (Bloomer, 1997). This paper offers my present professional self/I, from the various past selves. According to my experience Living educational theory form of action research is the most complex but most worthwhile form of action research suitable to produce leadership in education. My experience of living educational theory form of action research will be fully explained in another paper. The following narrative is based on various chapters of my EdD thesis to illustrate several forms of action learning and action research.

**In chapter (3), as a lecturer/teacher in Singapore Polytechnic (1965-68),** I provide useful knowledge of the work context, my professional competence in curriculum development as a new teacher during my first experience overseas. At that time I was mainly concerned with improving my content-knowledge to gain a professional qualification to become a professional builder in order to qualify to teach in the FE/HE sectors. To achieve this goal I intuitively created my own curriculum for self-learning and teaching as an integrated process and successfully gained my professional qualification and improved my teaching. Today it seems to me a remarkable achievement of a new teacher, indicating his intuitive competence in generating teaching-learning spaces where teaching becomes learning. However, my learning was incomplete.

In sixties I was not conscious of the importance of my remarkable competence in curriculum development. It was due to the fact that I was not conscious of the importance of converting experience into professional knowledge. Hence, my learning experience was incomplete and remained implicit. McNiff (1993) provides an excellent textbook showing how teaching becomes learning by the use of action research.

**In Sheffield Polytechnic (1968-71)** I used reflective thinking (plan-act-reflect and improve type) to improve the quality of my content-knowledge & pedagogical-content-knowledge

generally known as methodology of teaching. I used pre-tests to assess student previous learning and post-tests to assess their learning at the end of my teaching to evaluate the effectiveness of my pedagogical-content-knowledge. Using this methodology I was able to improve my pedagogical-content-knowledge.

I also observed that all teachers did not reflect on their teaching and that all teachers did not assume responsibility for their students' learning. From the beginning of my teaching experience I intuitively assumed the responsibility for improving the quality of my teaching and student learning to meet stakeholder needs but my knowledge remained personal and implicit. I believe I had acquired a degree of competence in transmitting, transforming and extending my content-knowledge in direct teaching in classrooms. I had much to learn about creating teaching -learning spaces.

At that time I could teach effectively using lectures and lesson methods of teaching but I had a little knowledge of many other methods such as project work, case studies, discovery learning, inquiry-based teaching and learning and a variety of media professional educators might use to teach and learn efficiently and effectively. My desire to extend my repertoire of teaching and learning methods and media coupled with lack of extrinsic motivation for personal development at the Sheffield Polytechnic brought me to Hong Kong as a senior lecturer in teacher training.

In my view this chapter highlights the importance of extrinsic motivation to support teachers' with intrinsic motivation and the need for teachers to own and contextualise student learning in using action learning and action research. In contrast to Singapore Polytechnic where I displayed my intrinsic motivation to improve my teaching and my professional knowledge with adequate appreciation of my work, Sheffield Polytechnic denied any such support.

**In the seventies in chapter (4) as a teacher trainer at the Hong Kong Technical Teachers' Training College (1971-81)** I came as a senior lecturer with a teachers' certificate and six years of teaching experience in two polytechnics but left as a Director of curriculum and staff development after ten years of experience as a teacher trainer with a Diploma in Educational Technology and MA in Education. Here I learnt and taught various methods of teaching and learning to large numbers of technical teachers and industrial trainers. I mainly used the Tyler (1949) approach to instruction and curriculum development and Joyce and Showers (1980) model to structure teacher training programmes. Both models were popular in teacher training in those days. From personal experience and formal inquiries I learnt much about the problems and promises in using these theoretical models in real settings.

During this period I was fortunate to have excellent opportunities for training in teacher education and a work context providing me with opportunity to test professional knowledge from training in practice. The essence of my learning and influences on the learning of others is largely captured in my dissertation for Diploma (Educational Technology) Plymouth Polytechnic (1974) and my dissertation for MA (Education), Lancaster University (1978). In the first dissertation the focus of the study is on how I taught and facilitated the use of educational technology into classroom teaching at the Hong Kong Technical Teachers' College as a whole. I think in the second dissertation I make a very useful contribution towards professional knowledge in education. In those days educational technology, curriculum development and teacher training emerged as separate movements to improve the quality of education. This fragmented approach did not produce desired results. Based on my personal experience and literature review, in my MA dissertation I offered a conceptual map for the integration of educational technology, curriculum and teacher training. I developed and used this map at the Hong Kong Technical Teachers' College as the director of teaching-learning resources and later used it as a consultant in other countries. Integration of technology into teaching remains still remains an important issue.

Furthermore, in Hong Kong Technical Teachers' College I was fully involved in all aspects of establishing a new college of education supporting concurrent development in technical and vocational education in Hong Kong. In Hong Kong Technical teachers College I had acquired experience of all aspects of the life of College. This experience provided a sound foundation for my later work as a consultant in curriculum, staff and institute development.

Although I considered myself an educational technologist engaged in the development and application of new methods and media to improve the quality of teaching generally, I also had intuitively developed and taught **action learning** in several areas of teacher training without naming and framing it action learning or action research. **Firstly**, I used action learning in supervising trainee teachers using planning, acting, reflecting and improving cycles during microteaching and clinical supervision in classroom teaching. During these sessions trainees planned and taught their lessons and reflected on their experiences to improve their teaching and their professional knowledge together with their trainers and colleagues. **Secondly**, I intuitively taught teachers' planning as action learning, a dialectical process between the planned lessons based on the Tyler (1949) framework and the implemented lessons based on teachers' thinking and actions in the real settings. Unknown to me at that time I was using what became action research in later years. This methodology integrated teacher development with improvement in the quality of teaching. **Thirdly**, I used the methodology developed in

instruction development in curriculum development as a dialectical process between the planned and the implemented curriculum conducted at the Hong Kong Technical Teachers' College.

My learning remained incomplete. At that time I was not fully aware of the importance of my personal experience and situated knowledge. This experience had to be converted into shared professional knowledge validated with other practitioners and academics to transform it into action research. The following letter from the Training Director of the Mass Transit Railway Corporation in Hong Kong provides a glimpse into the quality of my work as the director of a training programme using programme design, implementation, evaluation and improvement as an integrated process.

**Technical Teachers College Hong Kong**  
**5<sup>th</sup> September, 1977**

On behalf the executive of Mass Transit Railway Corporation I would like to express our appreciation to Mr. Smith Principal of the Technical Teachers College and his staff for their excellent services in the recent 3-week course on teaching techniques attended by the corporation's personnel.

The course was unqualified success and enjoyed by all, and I feel sure that when our employees are put to test in carrying out the techniques taught by the college, they will find their task that much easier than they would have done and we envisage their success rate to be high.

I should particularly like to express our appreciation to the course leader, Mr. Punia for his professional management of the course and his high contribution to its ultimate success.

With grateful thanks,

**D R Rich**  
**Training Development Manager Mass Transit Railway Hong Kong**

**Transition from Educational Technology into Action research**

I used educational technology approach for curriculum development based on the Tyler (1949) model. The Tyler (1949) model for curriculum and instruction development was popular amongst academics for its rational approach for curriculum and instruction development integrating learning objectives, content-knowledge, teaching-learning process and evaluation as an integrated system. I found that this model was an improvement on content-based curriculum to be delivered through frontal teaching in classrooms where often content, teaching process and student assessment did not match. For me the Tyler (1949) model with its later variations provided a systematic approach to teach and learn as an integrated process. The significant contribution of educational technology based on this model at that time was that it shifted teacher attention from the achievement of teaching

objectives to student learning objectives. In other words it placed the responsibility of student learning on teachers. In those days educational technology had been successfully used to produce high quality teaching-learning materials in distance teaching and learning. The Open University in the UK was a living example of its successful use in education. However, little was known about how teachers used this model in their teaching in real settings. I conducted my own inquiry into it.

I first realised the limitations of educational technology from my first study of technical teachers' planning in Hong Kong reported in my MPhil thesis (Punia, 1992). This study showed that teachers did not commence planning their lessons based on student learning objectives as suggested in the Tyler 1949 model. They planned their lessons based mainly on contextual influences and their professional competence in teaching. Education technology answered the question: **How should teachers improve practice in education generally?** It did not answer the question: how do teachers improve what they are doing? The answer to the later question became research on **'Teachers' Thought Processes'** (Clark and Peterson, 1986). Research on 'Teachers' Planning' was an integral part of this research.

Educational technology is still used to improve the quality of education. I believe it is important to understand the distinction between the two methodologies used to improve the quality of education.

**Educational technology, curriculum development and teacher development emerged in education in the UK & USA in Sixties and Seventies as independent disciplines to improve the quality of education. Practitioners in these fields of education worked independently. Hence there was need to integrate the three movements to enhance their impact on education. My MA dissertation (Punia, 1978) shows how I achieved this goal. Stenhouse (1975) conceptualised curriculum development as teacher development in the context of teachers testing proposed curriculum in their classrooms. He encouraged teachers to research their own teaching. Hence, he introduced the idea of practitioners researching their work to generate professional knowledge and to improve practice. Elliott (1991) and others who worked with Stenhouse in curriculum development projects later developed his ideas into action research in universities. I believe the following two points are important in understanding the difference between educational technology and action research.**

**In the early days educational technologists studied input/output relations using a systems approach to teaching and learning. They used empirical research to study teacher behaviour in achieving the pre-specified learning objectives ignoring teacher thoughts behind their behaviour and the contextual influences. They assumed that specification of learning objectives and**

measurement of their achievement was not problematic. They were engaged in producing generalised knowledge for the application of new methods and media in education but failed to produce the conclusive results. This led to shift in education research into the study of Teachers' Thought Processes.

In contrast Action research is a self-study with emphasis on the study of the processes used to achieve personal and professional goals based on personal standards of judgement. Action researchers produce personal practical knowledge in contrast to the application of disciplinary knowledge from educational psychology, sociology, philosophy and history of education. For instance, 'living educational theory form of action research' is the study of teacher action as a process used to improve teaching-learning practice and to tease out teacher goals, values, principles and various other influences of context embedded in teacher action.

Philosophically, in educational technology thought precedes action whereas in action research action precedes knowledge/thought. In educational technology the emphasis is on the planned action, whereas action research includes study of planned and unplanned action. In my view action research is self-study of the planned and planned action to generate practical knowledge as interface between theory and practice. In this context theory without action and action without theory is incomplete.

I regard my Hong Kong Technical Teachers' College experience the most fruitful for personal professional development, for technical teacher training in Hong Kong and the development of technical and vocational education at large. I believe this experience had provided adequate foundation for later successes as a consultant. I believe the success came from my passion for learning, openness to share my knowledge with colleagues and student teachers in a supportive work environment. It would seem to me that I had acquired the scholarship of teaching (Boyer 1990) at the Hong Kong Technical Teachers' college and I was ready for my next role.

My next role was different from my work at the Hong Kong Technical Teachers' College. As a teacher trainer I was largely engaged in providing propositional and personal professional knowledge to teachers with a little control over how they used this knowledge to improve practice. In the next role I became directly involved in not only in providing knowledge but also in its application to improve practice in real settings. I believe the next three chapters show how I acquired the scholarship of application (Boyer 1990).

In chapters 5& 6 as a consultant in curriculum, staff and institute development in Fiji Institute of Technology (1982-86) and Western Samoa Technical Institute (1986-1990) in the

South Pacific I became concerned with creating teaching and learning spaces for improving practice and practitioners working at all levels of these organisations including teachers, managers and policy makers. Unlike UK in these countries the technical institutes received little technical support from the top. They designed, implemented and evaluated their courses without any formal external accountability. In this context I had to play many roles to influence the various stakeholders.

The first project was mainly concerned with installing a systematic school-based curriculum development in the Fiji institute of Technology with eleven schools and 3000 students providing different forms of technical education and training with reasonable resources but the second project at the Western Samoa Technical Institute consisted of rebuilding a small technical institute in a derelict state with little local resources. This project involved several aid agencies in rebuilding the Institute. My specific responsibility was for curriculum and staff development but I got involved in all aspects of rebuilding this Institute (See principal's letter of appreciation) in a very difficult context described in my thesis (Punia, 2004).

In these projects I used action learning for curriculum and institute development later validated in Holly (1991). In the first form of action research the focus was on linking the planned curriculum with the implemented/operational curriculum in classrooms and in the later form it was not only matching planned curriculum with the implemented one but also to matching it with manpower needs of the country using connective curriculum (Young 1998). In the first project I used collaborative action learning involving management, myself and teachers in planning, implementing, evaluating and generating knowledge as an integrated process in developing institute-based curriculum development as interface between the planned and the operational curriculum. The aim of this project was to enhance consistency between the specified and taught curriculum within the Institute. The next project involved another dimension to curriculum development.

In the second project I examined the interface between the planned curriculum, operational curriculum and the national manpower needs. The two projects in these chapters achieved a high success in closing the gap between the planned and the operational curriculum as suggested in Stenhouse (1975) and in achieving high degree of relevance of planned learning experiences offered to meet student and manpower needs of the countries. More importantly they resulted in a considerable professional learning amongst those involved in these projects. These projects produced results beyond my expectations and the expectations of all those involved in these projects at a time when little professional knowledge was available in the professional literature, particularly in developing countries.



The following two testimonials from the local officers involved in these projects provide insider perspectives on these projects. The first testimonial is from the principal of the Fiji Institute of Technology who was actively involved in this project. He had joined the institute only a few months before I arrived as a consultant. He was an experienced administrator with little technical background and experience of running a large technical institute. He provided me with full collaboration in this project. Surprising to me in the following testimonial this person shows deep knowledge of my work and contributions. More importantly, he surprises me with his understanding of my personality and my contributions in several other organisations in the country beyond his Institute. I believe in this project insider/outsider collaboration and the use of collaborative action research improved curriculum, staff and institute development as an integrated process. Large numbers of people directly involved in these projects benefited. More importantly a large amount of professional knowledge in the form of Monthly Newsletters, Annual professional journals, teaching-learning materials and detailed records of work completed contributed towards the professional knowledge of the Institute.

### **Fiji Institute of Technology**

#### **TO WHOME IT MAY CONCERN**

**R S PUNIA Sept 1985**

This is to certify that Mr R S Punia has been working here as CFTC advisor for the last 4 years and has made a considerable contribution towards the improvement of curriculum and staff development. In fact he has led and accomplished this innovation in such an impressive and methodical manner that staff members have been trained and prepared simultaneously to the design and development of curriculum. Under his able leadership and direct guidance, all the ten schools have systematically produced formal documents in relation to syllabuses, continuous assessment, record books, examination moderation and assessment of student projects, with active involvement of the newly appointed Course Advisory Committees. It is entirely due to his curriculum development expertise, knowledge and skill that such a high degree of success has been achieved and the strength and status of FIT courses enhanced both in local and overseas circles. He has set up a viable system for the development of educational technology, teaching-learning resources and evaluation techniques.

In the area of staff development, he brought about the revision and upgrading of our Technical Teacher Training course and developed a staff team to implement the new plan. He developed and taught various special modular courses for selected categories of staff and inculcated the spirit and technique of self-development among them. He conducted refresher courses, seminars, and workshops for heads of schools, senior lecturers, lecturers and new recruits very effectively. It goes to his credit that a strong team of local counterparts has been prepared to carry the work forward.

Apart from his work at FIT he assisted with the curriculum and training programmes at the Fiji School of Medicine, College of Agriculture, Public Service Commission, Public Works Department, and Quality Circle. For his specialist knowledge, cooperative nature and sensitivity to local needs and aspirations, he has earned the respect and admiration of professionals and trainees alike. He has well-developed sense of responsibility and devotes his full time, attention and energy towards the success of

his assignments. He is a very resourceful and enlightened person and has received positive and enthusiastic response generally.

I have personally been associated with his programme and have found him to be highly professional in outlook, possessing ingenuity and acumen, stamina and good will. He keeps himself abreast with new literature in his field and is an enjoyable and benevolent company. It has been both a pleasure and uplift to have the opportunity of frequent discussions with him on professional and general matters. I have always found him to be forthright, lucid and sincere. Besides high professional qualifications, he has made a wholesome and elevating impact due to his personal, ethical and spiritual inclinations and standards. I record my sincerest appreciation for the distinguished services he has rendered to FIT and commend him for his integrity, capability and dedication. I wish him every success in life.

**S Singh**  
**Principal Fiji Institute of Technology**

When I left Fiji Institute of technology in 1985 it was the most advanced technical institute amongst the developing nations of the South Pacific region. I hoped that it would become the model for other developing countries in the South Pacific and/or it would merge in the University of the South Pacific. According to reliable sources after the political unrest in Fiji all the progress made during my stay in that country is lost.

In the second project at WSTI I worked with two ministers of education, two directors of education, four principals from three different counties, and six aid agencies. My EdD thesis provides full details of the complexities and the achievements of this project. The following letter of appreciation is from the last and first local principal of the second project. He sent it to me after my departure from his country. A young man with new academic qualifications from a university and enthusiasm to improve education in his country worked with me only for one year. He too surprises me with his deep appreciation of my contributions. Due to our brief association, he makes no mention of my character and the difficult context of this project.

**Western Institute of Technology**  
**R S Punia**  
**8, April 1991**

### **RECORD OF APPRECIATION FROM THE PRINCIPAL WSTI**

Your arrival in Western Samoa in May 1986 as advisor in curriculum development and staff development for Western Samoa Technical Institute came at a difficult phase in the development of the Institute.

Your tenure of 4 years coincided with very substantial development of the Institute in which you played the key role in planning, implementing and evaluation of training programs as well as ensuring that the various funding agencies and donors involved have been properly coordinated.

Your first task upon arrival was to assess the viability and appropriateness of a developmental document for the Western Samoa Technical Institute by AIDAB of Australia and to make recommendations to the Minister of Education. Based on your recommendations the AIDAB report was amended to provide the most important framework upon which to base future developments. Furthermore you were asked and willingly agreed to write the amended report. Your involvement and total commitment to the project '**Strengthening of the Western Samoa Technical Institute**' is very much appreciated in the following processes of development.

- Writing job descriptions and recruiting suitably qualified and experienced expatriate staff from Australia, New Zealand, United Nations, Japan and USA.
- Assisting the Principal in writing duty statements and recruiting local staff.
- Systematically revising curriculum to reflect the needs of industry, students and community.
- Planning and mounting additional courses including diplomas and technician courses in carefully selected areas.
- Designing and teaching a systematic program of inservice training for the staff.
- Designing and teaching in conjunction with the Secondary Teachers College, the Diploma in Vocational Education to train technical teachers for the Western Samoa Technical Institute as well as the staff from other technical centres including non-government organisations.
- Revising the overall course structure to clearly delineate entry and exit points.
- Liaising and making recommendations to upgrade the Apprentice Training Scheme
- Producing a college Hand book
- Producing a Newsletter
- Establishing an Academic Board

As a result of your commitment and direct involvement in our development work the Western Samoa Technical Institute is making tremendous progress as stated below.

- Government has approved a steady increase in budget allocation for the Institute based on increasing student roll to cater for the mass of school leavers at the Form 5 as well as additional courses.
- The Institute has now a better public and corporate image, evidenced by an increasing number of terminal employment and industrial attachments for work experience of our students.
- Closer cooperation has been achieved between the Institute, industry and other kindred institutions
- Academic Board now governs and approves courses, examinations and examination results.
- The Diploma of Vocational Education to train local teachers has solved the problem of chronic shortage of local teachers and the problem of certifying those who have had no teacher training. Furthermore, it helps to train staff needed for smaller vocational centres such as YMCA, Boys Brigade etc.
- By actively engaging in the curriculum development process you have established a systematic method for designing courses and improving the teaching learning process. Furthermore, staff of the Institute can now proudly claim expertise in curriculum development, a function not normally associated with teacher training in this part of the world.

- Regular staff development sessions have changed teacher attitude towards their work. Professionalism is now evident in my staff which makes administration that much easier. Staff-student relationship has improved tremendously. Failure and drop out rate have been reduced considerably. All these changes stem from an improved understanding of the psychology of education, which you have so rigorously promoted.

Your effort in producing the Institutes first Newsletter and a Handbook are acknowledged. Your coordinating role and meticulous approach for accountability are also acknowledged. We would have preferred to retain your services but respect the terms of your contract. On a more personal level I wish to acknowledge the professional advice and support you had given me at the early stages of my role as the principal.

Your Sincerely,  
**Mauliu Magele**  
 Principal WSTI

In this project I had to assume many roles and work in very difficult and turbulent circumstances. I believe my spiritual outlook on life, provided me with the commitment towards this project and enabled me to cope with many difficulties in this project (See Punia 2004). I believe my professional preparedness to meet local needs and support from CFTC, my employer in London, contributed largely towards the successes in both of these projects (Chopra 1996). My preparedness included technical competence and an integrated character based on spiritual values, interest in learning and sharing knowledge with others for the good of humanity at large.

To develop teaching-learning spaces as action research in these projects I used my past experience of design process working in the construction industry as a project manager and practical knowledge acquired from my own studies of teachers' thinking of their professional work. Unlike traditional researchers who commence with specifics ending in generalisations, architects as designers commence with general ideas and work towards particulars. This approach allows them to negotiate opportunities and constraints emerging during the life of a project. Norman (1999) provides another example of this form of action learning and action research for those interested in this form of action research useful in dealing with problems difficult to define in advance.

This period is particularly important for me due to the 'Nine Studies of Vocational Teachers Planning' @ the Fiji Institute of Technology' providing me with the teachers' perspective of curriculum development. These studies of '**Vocational and Technical Teachers' Thinking in the FE/HE sectors** on the use of the Tyler (1949) model for teachers' planning' reported in my MPhil thesis (Punia, 1992), highlighted the gap between the theory of the Tyler (1949) model for curriculum and instruction development and vocational teachers' perspective of curriculum development. My MPhil dissertation provides details of these studies with my

interpretations and use of this knowledge in **school-based curriculum development as collaborative action research** as a dialectical process between the planned and the operational curriculum, integrating staff development with curriculum development in a collaborative culture. In my MPhil dissertation I do not mention action research because I was not aware of its existence at that time. Surprisingly, at that time my supervisor and the examiners did not mention action research to me. I became aware of action research during my EdD studies when I met Jack Whitehead who is known for living educational theory form of action research. I developed my research methodology without formal study of action research.

The researchers on **Teachers' Thought Processes (Clark and Peterson, 1986)** assumed that in owning & contextualising the planned curriculum teachers improved the quality of the operational curriculum. I learnt from my studies of teachers' planning that only experienced vocational teachers improved the quality of their teaching and the quality of their professional knowledge by owning & contextualising the planned /externally specified curriculum. They did so by preparing a series of nested plans to contextualise the planned curriculum to meet their and their student needs in particular contexts. My studies showed that inexperienced teachers did not own and/or contextualise the planned curriculum. **Only experienced and committed teachers interested in improving their professional knowledge and the quality of their teaching used owning and contextualising process.** I became deeply interested in understanding the owning and contextualising process.

The following testimonial from my supervisor of MPhil dissertation provides a useful glimpse into my professional competence and character as an academic studying for MPhil (Punia, 1991).

**The University of Bath**  
**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

**RS PUNIA**  
(Nov 1991)

I have known Mr. Punia for about ten years. I first met him while he was studying at the Lancaster University where he left in 1982 to take up a position as consultant at the Fiji Institute of Technology. He has maintained a periodic contact since then, and recently registered as a research student at the University of Bath.

Mr Punia is an able and thoughtful academic. He is an active contributor to research seminars, an insightful commentator on others' research, and is adept at drawing upon concrete examples from his own experience to illustrate his points.

Mr Punia's research is on 'Teachers' Planning and its role in curriculum and staff development'. This draws particularly on the work he undertook in Fiji and constitutes a very useful study of institutional development, with implications for the management of educational institutions.

Mr Punia has worked extremely hard on his research and demonstrated a high level of commitment and determination. Both his work in Fiji and his work in this department demonstrate his ability to work well with others, being both a keen listener and able to express clearly his own point of view.

With his abilities and his vast amount of experience in different educational institutions, I have no hesitation in recommending him to you as an appropriate person to be considered for a senior management position in teaching or teacher education. If appointed you would also find that he makes a very amicable colleague.

**Professor James Calderhead**  
**The University of Bath**

I recently used my understanding of 'owning' and 'contextualising' in my EdD thesis (Punia 2004) to explain my professional learning and influences on other people's learning in a variety of roles and contexts. This inquiry shows that in my professional roles I assumed responsibility for meeting specific needs of various countries using a dialectical process between my professional selves as a consultant and the various countries as a co-creating process illustrated below.



In other words my I/self was learning in supporting the various contexts/countries and these countries benefited in supporting me. Thus, the self and the context benefited simultaneously. I understood that self-development is also social development and vice versa. We are not separate from society and society is not different from us. Krishnamurti, a renowned spiritual leader of this century used to say 'I am the world and the world is me'. It has been a very useful insight for my professional growth ever since. **For me understanding of this relationship of the individual self with the universal self remains the key to understanding commitment to undertake action research for personal and social development.**

Furthermore, I realised the professional significance of this kind of relationship in the becoming/making of professional educators/consultants offering real solutions to genuine problems in contrast to persons selling ready-made solutions to assumed problems of developing countries. I also learnt the importance of owning and contextualising process in solving human problems collaboratively.

**In Chapter (7) as a consultant in Human Resource Development (HRD)** in the nineties, I worked for Industrial and vocational Training Board (IVTB) & Mauritius Institute of Public Administration and Management (MIPAM) in Mauritius for five years (1992-97). IVTB catered for meeting national needs through vocational education and training and MIPAM catered for management development through training in the public sector. When I was recruited as a consultant through a UK organisation engaged in international development IVTB was busy in establishing the organisation structures and technology to make it operational. I was to provide leadership in curriculum and staff development but I got involved in aspects of the development of the Board (See the following testimonial).

During four years (1992-96) at the IVTB engaged in promoting training in vocational and technical education I taught the use of objectives-based curriculum to enhance relevance of IVTB training programmes to meet specific industrial needs while most of the IVTB training centres offered traditional content-based curriculum based on perceived manpower needs of the country. I conducted all my staff training programmes as action research in the form of plan, act, and reflect to improve the quality of training programmes and professional development of those involved in these programmes.

However, due to emphasis on quantity rather than on quality in early years, the staff of IVTB did not have the environment to learn from what they were doing. Understandably in the early years of the life of IVTB the management was busy establishing organisation structure to cope with the increasing manpower needs of the country with full employment. IVTB also offered training programmes through distance and apprenticeship modes but with little success. The following testimonial provides insider's understanding of my work at IVTB.

**Industrial and Vocational Training Boards Mauritius**

**R S Punia 1996**

**To WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

This is to certify that RS Punia has been working at the Industrial and Vocational Training Board for the last four years (1/11/92-1/11/96) as a consultant in curriculum and staff development. He has made a considerable contribution towards the improvement of the IVTB generally and towards the development of curriculum and staff development particularly. His first significant contribution came in the form of a leaflet outlining a framework for the further development of the National Trade Certification System, Trade testing, Distance Training and Apprenticeship.

In curriculum development he established a conceptual framework to plan long and short courses based on competency-based curriculum development. He prepared new curricula such as Plumbing and Pipe Fitting, Panel Beating, Furniture Making, Design etc and rationalised the existing curricula in Hotel and Catering, Jewellery, Shoe Making and Garment Making.

In staff training his significant contribution came in the form of one -week workshops in instructional techniques designed for the training officers from Piton and Beau Bassin Training Centres. These workshops came at a time when the Ministry of Education handed over these two training centres to IVTB using new training techniques, curricula and management style. These workshops proved very helpful in bringing about a smooth transition from one system to another. Many such inservice workshops and courses were later conducted for the training staff at all levels. All workshops were conducted professionally and were highly appreciated by those who participated in them.

Recently a Trainers Certificate in Vocational Training was developed to provide Qualified Trainer Status to untrained trainers from IVTB and private training centres.

This is a one-year modular programme moderated by the University of Bath in the UK, designed, implemented and evaluated by Mr Punia as the course director. The first batch of 23 trainers has recently completed this programme, which is highly appreciated by all the stakeholders.

Mr Punia also made contributions towards the development of the Resource Centre by introducing large amount of software in the form of professional journals, books and training equipment. He was an active contributor to countless meetings held to introduce innovations introduced during his stay. He worked in cooperation with all those who came in contact with him personally and professionally. As a result many IVTB staff benefited from his professional guidance.

I have personally known him for the last four years. After a very useful contribution at IVTB, I wish him every success in his future projects.

**Paul Lam HUNG**  
**Divisional Manager IVTB**

During one year (1996-7) at MIPAM I was recruited from IVTB with UNDP aid. I developed high quality management training programmes based on a thorough needs analysis and direct involvement of the top management of public sector in planning, implementing and evaluating training programmes as a learning process for those involved in these programmes. Curriculum development as a dialectical process between the planned and operational curriculum was based on action learning using planning, acting and reflecting and improving model to improve practice and practitioners as an integrated process. At MIPAM I gained new experience in the use of training to improve human performance.

My previous experience and professional literature had shown to me that generally organisations hired training providers to offer training programmes to solve their perceived performance problems without owning and contextualising the problem. This form of training failed to affect performance on-the-job. Unlike IVTB, direct organisational involvement in training their own staff for performing defined tasks and roles was a creative development in MIPAM. This practice provided evidence to show that improvement in human performance can take place through training provided the trainers and the organisation own and contextualise the problem collaboratively.

Using action research in training programmes I greatly improved the quality of training programmes under my leadership but the local trainers learnt according to their personal



needs and willingness to learn. With my previous experience at IVTB and work with a team of new trainers and the director recruited from educational institutions we achieved high success in making MIPAM operational within one year. It was a remarkable achievement of MIPAM. The following testimonial from the director of MIPAM provides insider's perspective of my contributions at MIPAM.

**Mauritius Institute of Public Administration and Management**  
**November 1997**

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**  
**R S PUNIA**

I have pleasure in stating that Dr Ram Singh Punia has been at the Mauritius Institute of Public Administration and Management as a UNDP Consultant during the period Nov1996-Vov 1997.

As we were in the process of establishing the Institute he has been involved in most of the activities pertaining to the launching of a new institution. These activities have included the purchase of new equipment and materials, creation of a Resource Centre, recruitment and training of staff, negotiations with client organisations and preparation and running of training courses. In particular he has been directly responsible for monitoring and running 'Training Needs Analysis' and 'Training of Trainers' programmes. These programmes have been carried out to the full satisfaction of our clients. Additionally he has covered modules on several of our other training programmes in management.

During the period that DR Punia has been with us, procedures have been established for the proper design, implementation and evaluation of courses. All our courses are launched properly, closely monitored and appropriately evaluated. By and enlarge it can be said that the courses organised by MIPAM are known to be good quality and in line with the best programmes offered by reported institutions.

Dr Punia has extensive experience in the field of training and we have benefited from his presence at the Institute. He is endowed with a spirit for cooperative endeavour and has been a very useful member of the MIPAM team. I am confident that, if given opportunities, he can be of great assistance to training organisations.

**SK Joypaul**  
**Director MIPAM**

Using action research I significantly improved my practice and professional knowledge, but I believe my influence on local trainers in both boards was less than satisfactory for various reasons. Firstly, most of the trainers came from educational institutions using lectures to deliver their content-knowledge with little concern for trainee performance needs. They suffered from cultural shock at MIPAM and at IVTB. It was difficult for them to change from being teachers teaching to pass examinations into facilitators of learning to improve performance. Secondly, they lacked intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to learn from experience using action research. Thirdly, during the early years of the development of these institutions emphasis was on quantity, not the quality of work. This chapter shows that there is little scope for introducing action research in organisations without concern for quality and sustainability of growth.

**Chapter (8) includes the process of becoming an academic from a practitioner as a part-time student for EdD from (1998-2000).** In this chapter I provide my experience of learning from four taught modules in the EdD taught programme, including International Education, Education Research, Education Policy and Curriculum Development. My aim was to update, extend and share my practical knowledge. Again I used action research in the form of a dialectical process between theory learnt from the EdD programme and my previous practical experience in completing my four assessed assignments. Thus I was able to validate and extended my practical experience and knowledge with the professional literature and the academics at the University of Bath. Using this methodology I was able to make my implicit knowledge explicit to share it with other professionals and academics. It is important for practitioners and academics to realise that practice without theory and theory without practice remains an incomplete learning experience and it is important to understand the theory/practice interface to generate practical knowledge. The following case illustrates the its importance to practitioners.

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### **Do Practitioners Learn from Experience?**

Mauritius has beautiful Botanical Gardens with unusual Fauna and Flora and these gardens are a famous tourist spot. When I first visited this place it was not properly managed. Many bogus tourist guides moved around excessively charging and harassing the foreign tourists. Somehow this news reached the government and relevant ministers were asked to look into the matter.

There were many stakeholders in this problem: the ministry of tourism, the ministry of agriculture, the ministry of human resources and the police department. Stakeholders generally assumed that training would solve this performance problem. After many months in various ministries this problem landed in IVTB and finally on my desk as a consultant in curriculum and staff training. The manager of the curriculum division asked me to design and conduct a training programme for the tourist guides.

I suggested to the manager of the curriculum division that the solution to this problem did not lie in training the tourist guides alone. The whole system comprised of recruitment, training, salary structure of guides, their uniforms, placement and management had to be tackled holistically to solve this problem involving all stakeholders with IVTB providing leadership in curriculum development for solving the problem as a whole. The manager of curriculum division of IVTB accepted my advice and decided to co-ordinate the project with my active support.

We began by understanding the problem by identifying and contacting the various stakeholders. Next, we conducted a two-day workshop to determine the duties of the tourist guides with various

competencies including knowledge, skills and attitudes involved in their job. We used brainstorming approach involving all the stakeholders to determine the training needs.

On the basis of this information I designed the curriculum with clear objectives, content, teaching-learning strategy, assessment strategy, evaluation and a certification strategy as an integrated system. We managed to find experienced guides and a scholar who had written a book on the Botanical Gardens to teach the content of the training programme. The other stakeholders took care of the recruitment of suitable guides, their placement, supervision and other associated matters.

We had no previous experience of handling such a problem. However, the problem was successfully solved with co-operation and involvement from so many people from various ministries. Besides a formal evaluation of the whole experience, the real evidence of the success came to me as follows.

Soon after the completion of this project I visited the Botanical Gardens with my son who was visiting Mauritius for a holiday. A smartly dressed young man greeted us and offered to show us around the gardens. He had professional appearance and behaviour as I had envisaged in designing my programme. Here was a living proof of the success of our collaborative action to solve this performance problem. It came from stakeholders who decided to own and contextualise their problem under the guidance of a facilitators. IVTB used to provide publicity to some of its projects with some degree of success. To my surprise nobody attached any importance to the success of this highly successful project.

Did we learn from this experience? Our later actions in solving problems indicated that those with little interest in the project failed to learn altogether, interested people might have learnt but their knowledge remained incomplete until it was validated in professional knowledge and with other professionals. Theory without practice and practice without theory remains partial learning.

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This chapter provides useful **practical knowledge** on:

1. International education.
2. Problem-based research methodology.
3. A Relations approach to curriculum development.
4. Influence of top-down initiatives on the nature of curriculum, teaching and assessment?

The first paper explains the emerging concept of international education and its use in international schools providing formal education to generate international-mindedness (Hayden & Thompson, 1999) amongst its students. In the second paper I examine problem-based research methodology (Robinson 1993) proposed for overcoming the problem of research/practice divide. In the third paper I examine the K& P (1999) theory of curriculum

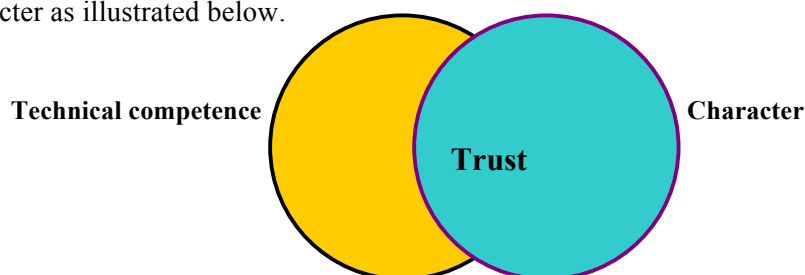
development in organisations to enhance human performance in the light of my practical experience of enhancing performance in organisations. Based on case studies from my practical experience and relevant literature in the last paper I examine the problems and possibilities of top-down policies to improve the quality of education. These papers provide useful practical knowledge to other professionals engaged in solving similar problems elsewhere.

According to reports from my colleagues and seniors during my professional work my personal character played the most important role of which I was unconscious. I rejected these remarks of my colleagues and students. I believe that all action is very complex in nature and we do not understand its nature fully. In this perspective it is rather pedantic to make any individual claims towards any personal knowledge. The last chapter of my EdD thesis explicates my embodied ontology and epistemology.

### **Creating Self-knowledge using Living Educational Theory form of Action Research**

I was unaware of my self-knowledge when I first met Jack Whitehead, my EdD supervisor, who seems to have a special vision to recognise professionals with special embodied knowledge and values. Like me, often these people fail to recognise it for themselves. Whitehead persuaded me to explicate and share my professional experience with other professionals. I undertook my inquiry rather reluctantly and without a clear idea of the methodology and the expected outcome. As a result of my inquiry I found that Living Educational Theory form of action research provides a useful methodology to produce self-knowledge of distinguished professional educators. The learning theories of such educators are far more useful than those constructed from animal learning. University of Bath department of education is known for this form of action research. Personally I am better informed about my technical competence and character as a professional educator.

My implicit knowledge of my professional learning and influences, particularly the influences of my character, became explicit through my EdD inquiry using living educational theory form of action research in (Punia 2004). As a result of this inquiry I learnt that mutual trust I enjoyed with my students and colleagues came from the integration of technical competence and character as illustrated below.



My EdD thesis (Punia 2004) is the study of the nature of my professional self/(I) comprised of my technical competence and personal character with certain embodied values derived from spiritual principles/laws embedded in my C V as an international educator. It uses living educational theory from of action research to study interface amongst my roles, professional selves/I and contexts detailed in another paper.

This thesis provides evidence to show that the mutual trust I invoked amongst students, colleagues and seniors was the product of my embodied technical competence integrated with a character based on values derived from a spiritual belief in the oneness and interrelatedness of the universe with many forms. I consider my I/self part of the universal self as its context. With this belief owning and contextualising my roles came naturally to me. I believe this belief originated in my upbringing, but it grew in the context of international living. Fullan (1999) explains:

**The more we work with wider and wider environments, the more likely we are to discover the professional and spiritual meaning of what Senge (1990) called the individual whole: All boundaries, national boundaries included, are fundamentally arbitrary. We invent them and then, ironically, we find ourselves trapped within.**

I have attempted to represent my professional self as tree of my life presented on the next page, including both visible and invisible parts of my being and highlighting the importance of the invisible aspect of my professional I/self. Groeberg (1993) expresses the significance of invisible part as follows:

**The source of leadership success lies below the surface. They are the personal character, principles and values of the leader. The most successful leaders work to develop these roots in themselves, and the organisation they lead.**

My emergent standards of judgement as an international educator are:

**Leading professionals possess high order perspectives as principles necessary for self-understanding to actualise self. A personal 'world view' is the basis of self-awareness, interpretation and an essential prerequisite to the process of reflection that is the key to personal learning and so to growth through transformation (West-Burnham, 2000, p.77).**

The advent of the 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges us educators, consultants, managers, trainers, and teachers to engage in lifelong learning at a deep level and make a positive difference in our society, our workplace and our physical environment. Action learning provides one road for this journey into honesty, integrity and evolutionary interdependence (Passfield 1996, p. 26).



**Roots:** Universal principle of cosmic unity, personal beliefs & values as standards of professional judgement.

**Trunk:** Emergent Professional self from a dialectal process between various selves and contexts.

**Branches:** International contexts: India, UK. Singapore, Hong Kong, Fiji, Western Samoa, Mauritius.

**Sub-branches:** A variety of professional roles: A lecturer to a consultant in technical & vocational education.

**Leaves:** knowledge, skills and attitudes required for creating teaching-learning spaces.

**Fruit:**

- Technical competence necessary to solve professional problems in education and construction industry.
- An integrated character necessary to generate trust and cooperation.
- Legacy on technical and vocational education, training in the FE/HE sector in several countries.

The following testimonial from Jack Whitehead provides his perception of my professional work.

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

**RE: Dr Ram Punia**

I have known Dr. Ram Punia for some 15 years through his association with the University of Bath and as his supervisor for his EdD Dissertation. He has worked as an international consultant in Singapore, Hong Kong, Fiji, Western Samoa and Mauritius. In his work as an educational consultant he has always emphasised the importance of judging the effectiveness of ideas about the processes of improvement in practice. He understands the importance of developing a sense of ownership of curriculum and management change amongst all participants in organisational change. This requires the development of a more distributed form of leadership than is usual in many hierarchically structured organisations.

Dr Punia's approach to educational change is influenced by action research approach in which individuals are encouraged to ask, research and answer questions of the kind, 'how do I improve what I am doing'? Using a systematic form of action-reflection cycles individuals work at improvements in their own practice and share their learning with groups of colleagues. There is an emphasis on gathering data on which to make judgements about effectiveness and sharing evidence based stories of learning in the process of improving practice.

The strength of Dr Punia's approach to learning and educational change lies in his ability to begin with the experiences, values and understanding of those with whom he is working. He quickly establishes a rapport with others through his capacity for attentive listening and sensitivity to response to the learning needs of those he is working with.

DR. Punia's success as an agent of educational change lies in his capacity to motivate the creative energies of mind and critical judgement of those he is working with in developing sustainable processes of educational improvement within organisational context. His awareness of the importance of culture and context in improving learning in relation to the purpose of an organisation also contributes to his effectiveness. I think you will find inspiring his commitment to supporting the well-being and development of your staff and your organisation.

Yours Sincerely,

**DR. Jack Whitehead**  
**The University of Bath 18/7/05**

Living educational theory form of action research at the university of Bath is beginning to shed light on the embodied values of professional educators. In living educational theories form of action research the emphasis is on the character of the researcher based on his/her ontology and Epistemology.

**In short, the above narrative shows how I gradually learnt to integrate theory with practice, and technical competence with character based on values from spirituality. More importantly, I learnt to convert implicit knowledge acquired from personal insights from practice into explicit/rational knowledge. I continued to add new dimensions to my professional experience and knowledge from continuous learning. International experience introduced flexibility and inclusionality in my thinking and actions dedicated as service to the universal self as one life and many lives simultaneously. I achieved it using various forms of action learning and action research directed towards improving what I was doing and helping others to do the same.**

Unfortunately during my professional career most British universities did not accept practical knowledge for academic awards and I did not meet academics with interests in this form of research. Now most British Universities value this kind of research and knowledge for making academic awards but still few practitioners make use of this opportunity. At present Action research resides mainly in universities. I aim to encourage more practitioners to make use of this opportunity to improve themselves, their work and life as a whole.

Currently only intrinsically motivated people are engaged in action research without any extrinsic support from policy makers and leaders of organisations. Their work receives inadequate recognition from society. I believe that we should begin by valuing the work of committed educators and work towards providing active support to less motivated practitioners to undertake action research for personal and social empowerment.

### **A Few Unresolved Issues in using Action Research for Academic Awards**

In this section I share some of the issues I encountered in learning action research. I am sure gradually these are being resolved.

**Firstly**, there are divergent views on who should do action research. Some researchers believe that the individual practitioner researches his own work to produce personal professional knowledge. Others believe it is collaborative inquiry practitioners undertake to improve their practice. For academic awards this kind of research should be carried out collaboratively with academics from universities who have better experience of generating knowledge through research. In my view it is not helpful for the beginners in action research to take notice of such propositions before undertaking action research. I find that action research becomes an integral part of our lives when we systematically learn from our lives and share our



knowledge with each other for the good of humanity at large. I strongly believe that if we do it in large numbers, this world might be a better place to work and live together in peace.

**Secondly**, action research can be undertaken for various purposes and at various levels of complexity as evident from the professional literature and my personal experiences. These levels span over a long range commencing with trainee teachers reflecting on their teaching practice to improve the quality of content-knowledge to the reflections of professional educators reflecting on their lifelong professional experiences to generate self-knowledge (e.g. Punia 2004)). The standards of judgement each university uses in making academic awards at various levels remains unclear. Probably each university has its own hierarchy of awards and uses its own standards of professional judgement. It may be useful for prospective action researchers to find out the standards of judgement of their university or express their own standards of judgement used in their research.

**Thirdly**, to exploit the tremendous potential of this form of action research remains unexplored in organisations due to ingrained value differences amongst academics and practitioners as shown in the opening of this paper. Action research has the potential to understand and use these differences constructively. I believe examiners for academic awards in universities should include academics from universities and professional educators from practice.

**Fourthly**, Action researchers in universities also continue to advocate their own brands of action research. It is important to present action research as a new and an evolving methodology with many forms and with tremendous unexplored potential. I do not find it helpful to criticize other research methodologies to make a case for the use of action research. We need all research methodologies including action research to understand complexities of life. Each methodology has its own strengths and weaknesses.

### **Unexplored Potential of Action Research**

Basically action research improves practice, practitioners and the quality of professional knowledge through reflective thinking. Generally action researchers tend to grow into life-long learners. More importantly, academics and the practitioners work together for the good of humanity. I believe these possibilities have the potential to improve the quality of human life on this planet. Action research introduces a new paradigm of research whose time has come in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in need of knowledge workers. I believe action research demands the following changes in our mindset to make full use of it to improve the quality of our lives.

**First,** Action research proposes new standards of judgement in the making of professional educators in our universities and leaders of organisations. It demands technical development integrated with character development. Currently we overly emphasise technical competence at the expense of character development. This lopsided human professional development is creating ethical and relational problems in the world.

**Secondly,** Whitehead uses the term professional educator to describe the various people involved in education. I believe he has captured the essence of professionalism in education. According to him professional educators are engaged in creating teaching-learning spaces for themselves and those they teach. Thus all educators, from ministers of education to classroom teachers become professional educators. Unfortunately this conception of professionalism is not recognised and nurtured to improve the quality of human life through education on this planet. The concept of education is steeped in formal schooling based on factory thinking of the industrial age.

**Thirdly,** Action research is the best tool in the hands of governments to empower themselves and their people. It is far better to introduce change with human development as an integral aspect of technical development than pouring large sums of money and introducing new systems without integrated human development. People development is more important than system development.

**Fourthly,** for many valid and invalid reasons developing countries borrow professional knowledge from developed nations. Some of this knowledge creates problems instead of solving them. To solve their own problems developing countries should learn to create their own knowledge and to adapt the borrowed knowledge from developed countries. Action research provides a useful tool to tackle this problem.

**Fifthly,** as an international educator engaged in promoting international-mindedness (Hayden & Thompson 1998), I believe that action research has the potential to promote international cooperation and understanding through international aid projects in developing countries. It might be useful for aid agencies and other formal organisations engaged in promoting international-mindedness to integrate knowledge production as an integral aspect of technical development.

**Lastly,** technical development alone has not and cannot improve the quality of life on our planet. Technical development integrated with character development with embodied universal values has the potential to promote working and living together in peace on this

planet. To overcome these long-term problems we need different kinds of mindsets. I believe Living educational theory form of action research is most suitable for generating and promoting such a mindset. What I am advocating in this paper is not a pipe dream of an armchair academic. The Department of Education of the University of Bath has many living educational theories of professional educators committed to these values.

### **Summary**

Basically action research is about producing knowledge from what we do in our lives. Anyone can do it with will to improve their practice and themselves. I have met people without any formal education but with astonishing wisdom of human nature and the nature of life as a whole. They accumulate this wisdom through action learning and action research as an attitude of mind using nature as an open book to learn from.

It is difficult to explain action research as a single methodology to encourage prospective practitioners to undertake such inquiries. Chistenson et al (2000) wrote: *“I think the action research does not necessarily focus on perfection, rather a willingness to try new things, be flexible, and grow through complications”*. This quotation represents my early experiences of action research as a practitioner with emphasis on commitment to improve practice. Schon (1995) & Whitehead (1989, 2008, 2009) represent my later experiences of action research as an academic discipline. These writers mark the continuum in the growth of my experience of action research over a long time.

My EdD thesis and the professional literature introduced above provide examples of many forms of action research. Generally the best way to learn action research is to begin by doing it informally. Eventually it becomes a natural part of one’s life. Thus one starts to live a life of inquiry and live it more consciously and more fully.

To encourage the use of action research to make a difference for the betterment of life as a whole it also has to be promoted through policy and practice from the top of organisations. It has not happened yet. This paper is a plea for taking an active part in undertaking and promoting action research for the good of our planet.

According to my experience presented in this paper all forms of action research are important to improve practice and practitioners. Living educational theory of action research used at the university of Bath department of education with emphasis on integrating technical and personal development is the most useful form of action research with tremendous unexplored potential for holistic human development. While (Senge 1990, Covey 1992, 2004) provide

useful propositional knowledge to achieve this goal, the University of Bath department of Education provides living educational theories of professional educators who embody this propositional knowledge.

I would like to close this paper from a recent episode in explaining action research as a learning methodology to a mixed group of people in a seminar and to a reporter who wished to report on action research as a new methodology of learning from practice.

### The Problem

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Two years ago I was invited to Mauritius to conduct a series of one-day seminars for senior practitioners with mixed backgrounds and interests on the various methods available for enhancing human performance in organisations. I introduced three methods:

- Systematic training as an integral aspect of Human resource development,
- Competency-based training to enhance relevance of training to performance,
- Action research to improve practice and practitioners as an integrated process.

Based on long experience in dealing with this problem in the international arena I tried to relate the various themes as follows:

I explained that systematic training experts/consultants like myself provide fails to effect human performance adequately until it becomes an integral aspect of Human Resource Development policy and practice in organisations. Competency-based training model is based on assumed national needs. Competency-based training cannot meet the needs of all employers. Most importantly Competency-based model has nothing to do with creating teaching-learning spaces. It places the onus of learning on individuals and training providers.

In action research individuals and organisations take responsibility for improving practice and themselves. They learn from practice to produce their own practical knowledge to fit their needs. Furthermore, Action research supported by universities provides opportunities to gain academic qualifications to become professional educators.

All three methods are useful in different contexts but Action research is the best method to enhance human performance to maintain sustainability in growth in organisations and in our planet as a whole. Amongst those who attended my seminars, only a few self-motivated individuals showed enthusiastic interest in action research. This incident confirmed my previous experience that only self-motivated people use this methodology without any extrinsic support.

During this seminar one day a reporter turned up with a photographer to inquire into the nature of action research as a new methodology of learning and creating professional knowledge. I told him that if you listen to me carefully and keep authentic records of our conversation, reflect on it to find the best

way to report your work after validating it with me, you would have created new professional knowledge and improved the quality of your work. That is a simple example of action research, which is beneficial to you, your employer and the people in Mauritius. Gradually action learning and action research has the potential to generate empowered people in your country. Furthermore, now many Universities accept such practical knowledge for making academic awards.

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This person did not come to me after this encounter. I do not know what he wrote in his paper in French. My host sitting by me listening to our conversation also did not report to me what was written in the paper next morning. This incident prompted me to produce this paper to persuade practitioners to undertake action learning and action research.

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