

Report on CoE 2010 0517-0520 'Action Research in the Function of Professional Development of Teachers', 17-20 May 2010, Zagreb.

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The leadership, organization and contents of the workshop were exemplary. Many productive relationships were established. I believe that these will be sustained in enhancing the influence of action research in the professional development of teachers for improving pupils' learning.

Leadership

I was most impressed by the quality of leadership shown by members of the Education and Teacher Training Agency of Croatia, including Vinko Filipovic, Renata Ozorlic Dominic, Debravka Kovacevic, Sanja Milovic and Ninocka Truck-Biljan. Action researchers around the world are interested in how to enhance the systemic influence of action research in the professional development of teachers and the Education and Teacher Training Agency of Croatia is leading international understandings on how this can be accomplished. I am hopeful that the accounts of these participants that explain how this systemic influence has been accomplished will be made public on the web.

The leadership and understandings of action research shown by Alan Markowitz of the College of St. Elizabeth in the USA and Tim Cain from the University of Southampton, UK, helped with the framing of the conference theme. It was clear from the comments of participants that their contributions were valued highly in distinguishing what counted as action research and in stimulating conversations between the participants on what their own action research enquiries could focus on. These presenters also made themselves fully available for consultations and informal conversations with participants and I know that this was greatly valued.

Organization

The organization of the workshop was excellent and I wish to commend the care and attention to participants' needs shown by Renata Ozorlic Dominic and Debravka Kovacevic who contributed much to the success of the workshop. The programme was organized with a good balance between the academic contributions from action researchers and the cultural activities that helped participants to understanding something of the socio-historical context of the location in Zagreb and Croatia. Holding one of the days in a school in Koprivnica was much appreciated, as was the trip to see one of the environmental and conservation projects in the area.

Bringing together individuals interested in developing action research in teachers' professional development was also a major achievement in the organization. During the first day I participated in one discussion group of 6 individuals from Estonia, Latvia, Czech Republic, Romania, Croatia and the UK. We all communicated in a way that showed a remarkable agreement in the values that carry hope for the future of humanity and our own. These were the values we wished to live more fully through our action research into improving our practice and in contributing to educational knowledge. This sharing of values and understandings across different cultural and national boundaries is a tribute to the organizers of the workshop.

The organization of high-speed web-access was also much appreciated by the presenters of the sessions. This gave presenters live access to the Internet and they were able to show the action research resources freely available to participants and the use of visual data, drawing on web-based video, for inclusion in action research accounts.

The organization of the accommodation, food and transport was also excellent with efficient transport to and from the airport. The hotel accommodation was good with excellent wireless Internet connections for guests.

Content

The coverage of the workshop was excellent. The contribution from Branko Bognar, from the Faculty of Philosophy in Osijek, on Significant Changes in Educational Practice through Action Research, places the action research of teachers and their pupils, advisors and scholars in Croatia at the forefront of the field in international understandings of how action research can be used in the professional development of teachers and in improving pupils' learning. I include within this understanding the work of Sanja Mandaric on 'The importance of Values for Teachers as Action Researchers' and of Klara Bilic Mestric on 'The Role of a Critical Friend for Teachers as Action Researchers'.

Having attended and presented at action research conferences in many countries over the past 36 years I can say with some confidence that spreading the influence of the understandings of the Croatian action researchers at the workshop is a major contribution to the development of action research for the professional development of teachers. Their use of visual data, using digital technology, in studying their own practice and in the educational influences in learning of teachers, advisors and pupils is at the forefront of the field, as is their use of critical friends to assist in the development of practice and in enhancing the validity of the accounts of learning. The e-journal, 'The Educational Journal of Living Theories' (see <http://ejolts.net/>), has already published accounts of Croatian action researchers with their pupils and is helping to enhance their educational influences. Huxtable (2009), one of the contributors to the conference, has already published some work in the British Educational Research Association's newsletter, Research Intelligence, in which she explains the significance of the use of visual data in transforming what counts as educational knowledge. Publishing the accounts presented at the workshop could do much to contribute to this transformation in educational knowledge in European and International forums of educational research and professional development.

Tim Cain and Alan Markowitz emphasized the importance of making public the accounts of action research in their sessions on 'Writing up an Action Research Report' and on 'Writing, Sharing, and Implementing the Results of an Action Research Project'. Snjezana Pavic, Ljerka Vukic, Nataliga Flamaceta Magdic, Ljiljana Kolar-Franjes, Jesenka Poljak and Anita Vegh demonstrated what was involved in making public enquiries into 'Action Research and Learner Autonomy' and 'Action Research in ELT'. Many of the Croatian action researchers demonstrated that their enquiries were well advanced and they confidently presented their action research accounts. The majority of participants from other countries were just beginning to express an interest in action research and the workshop provided

opportunities for them to form their action research questions and share these with other participants.

I don't want to overlook the competence of participants in expressing their ideas in English. English is the second language for the majority of the participants and given that my only language is English, I was most impressed with the fluency of participants in a language other than their first language.

Developing Intercultural Understandings

With participants from Croatia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Greece, Latvia, Norway, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, UK, USA there were many opportunities for conversations on the constraints and opportunities for developing action research within different cultural contexts.

One opportunity that could be developed from the Workshop is an e-forum, such as that provided by JISC in the UK, for sustaining the conversations about action research. The JISC e-forums provide a virtual space for multiple threads and a monthly archiving of the correspondences. It would be a good developmental practice to create such an e-forum so that participants could share their action research enquiries about improving their practice, any questions they want to share about the processes and accounts of their educational influences in their own learning, in pupils' learning and in colleagues' learning.

An example of such a virtual space for action researchers can be seen in the practitioner-researcher e-forum at:

<https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=practitioner-researcher>

The moodle space offered by the Educational Journal of Living Theories coordinated by Branko Bogar could also provide such a forum.

More use might be made of the Internet for sharing action research accounts from the various countries. For example the resources made freely available from <http://www.actionresearch.net>, could be made more valuable by extending the cultural and national contexts from which action research accounts by teachers are emerging. It may be that the Education and Teacher Training Agency of Croatia could provide a lead in developing such interconnecting and branching channels of communication through the Internet.

If each participant would provide a web-based description of their socio-cultural context, together with some brief details of their action research projects, we could all develop a sense of belonging to a research community with a commitment to sustain our relationships and help each other with our enquiries. This would add to the sustained significance of the Workshop in the evolution of the action research enquiries of participants. I cannot stress too much the importance of developing a research community for sustaining an action research approach for the professional development of teachers. The outcomes of such a research community can be seen in the resources offered at <http://www.actionresearch.net>.

It might well be that much good could be done by inviting participants to attend and present the outcomes of their action research in a further workshop in 12 or 24 months time. This would help to sustain and extend the influence of the Workshop.

I wish to thank the organizers of the Workshop for the opportunity to present and to participate in such a meaningful educational experience.

Reference

Huxtable, M. (2009) How do we contribute to an educational knowledge base? A response to Whitehead and a challenge to BERJ. *Research Intelligence*, 107, 25-26. Retrieved 11 January 2008 from <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/huxtable/mh2009beraRI107.pdf>