Chapter 4
A New View of Research: Research Within Practice Traditions

What's Critical about Critical Participatory Action Research?

As the title of this chapter implies, we regard the 'research' part of 'critical participatory action research' as important, but we want to say immediately that the 'research' we anticipate does not simply borrow the notion of research from other forms of social and educational enquiry. We do not regard the 'research' part of critical participatory action research as a matter of employing or applying some 'correct' set of research 'techniques' borrowed from other fields like agriculture (the field for which many of our experimental statistics were originally developed). In our view, critical participatory action research is not a *technique* or a set of techniques for generating the kinds of 'generalisations' that positivist social and educational research aims to produce[1]. On the contrary, critical participatory action research aims to help people to understand and to transform 'the way we do things around here'. In particular, critical participatory action research aims to help participants to transform (1) their *understandings* of their practices; (2) the *conduct* of their practices, and (3) the *conditions* under which they practise, in order that these things will be more rational (and comprehensible, coherent and reasonable), more productive and sustainable, and more just and inclusive. Critical participatory action research aims for a deep understanding of participants' practices and the practice architectures that support those practices. In critical participatory action research, we are interested in *what happens here*—this single *case*—not what goes on anywhere or everywhere.

As critical participatory action researchers, therefore, we initially approach our own situation in the way an *historian* would approach it[2]. Like the historian, we want, first, to understand how things work *here*, how things have come to be, what

[1] For an extended critique of the positivist approach to social and educational research, see Carr and Kemmis (1986).

[2] For a view of critical history, see R. G. Collingwood's (1946) *The Idea of History*; for his view on what counts as evidence in history, see pp. 249–283 Epilegomena 3: 'Historical evidence'. You can find it online at: http://www.brocku.ca/MeadProject/Collingwood/1946_3.html.

S. Kemmis et al., *The Action Research Planner,* DOI 10.1007/978-981-4560-67-2_4,

kinds of consequences our practices (and the practice architectures that support them) have produced and do produce. Then, second, we adopt a *critical stance* towards what happens: in conversation with others involved in and affected by our practice (as a public sphere), we ask, "Are the consequences of our practices in some way untoward (irrational, unsustainable, or unjust)?" If we come to the conclusion that the consequences of our practices *are* in some way untoward, then we know we must *make changes* in our practices (and to our understandings of our practices, and to the conditions under which we practice) in order to prevent, avoid or ameliorate those untoward consequences. At this point, third, our conversation becomes more practical and focused. We engage in *communicative action* with others to reach (a) intersubjective agreement about the ways we understand the situation (the language we use), (b) mutual understanding of one another's points of view (and situations), and (c) unforced consensus about what to do. Once having established, preferably by consensus, what we should do to prevent, avoid, or ameliorate the untoward consequences of our existing practices, then, fourth, we *act* to transform our practices, our understandings of our practices, and the conditions under which we practise. As we do so, fifth, we *document and monitor* what happens to see if we are now preventing, avoiding or ameliorating the untoward consequences of our previous ways of working, and to check that our new ways of working are not producing new or different untoward consequences.

These steps (not always in perfect order) are what is characteristic about the particular kind of action research we advocate in this book: *critical*, *participatory* action research. This kind of action research is *critical* because it takes the first three of these steps: (1) closely examining our practices, our understandings and the conditions under which we practise, (2) asking critical questions about our practices and their consequences, and (3) engaging in communicative action with others to reach unforced consensus about what to do. And this kind of action research is *participatory* because it involves a range of people involved in and affected by our practices in those three steps, as well as in (4) taking action to transform our practices, our understandings of our practices, and the conditions under which we practise, and (5) documenting and monitoring what happens.

In critical participatory action research, we aim to make changes in our own situations to enact more satisfying, sensible and sustainable ways of doing things. To put this more precisely, through critical participatory action research we want to find and enact ways of doing things that are *less* irrational or unreasonable than the ways we do things now, as well as *less* unproductive or wasteful or unsustainable, and *less* unjust or exclusionary.

If—and it is a choice—we write the story of our critical participatory action research for others, we hope they will also learn from our story. We hope they will learn something from our story in the same way that we also learn from history and from stories of others' experiences. At the same time, however, we do not expect people who read our critical participatory action research story to imitate whatever *we* did. We expect that they will make their own wise judgements about what parts of *our* story might be relevant to *their* situations—to their stories and their histories. This is a major difference between critical participatory action research and some other conventional forms of research, especially correlational and experimental social and

educational research: in critical participatory action research, we do not aim to produce generalisations about 'the one best way' to do things. In fact, we don't want to find the best way to do things anywhere *except here*—where we are, in our situation. And even in our situation, while we hope for the best, we expect only to do as well as we can, under our circumstances, to prevent or avoid or ameliorate any untoward consequences of our practices—consequences enjoyed or endured by the people who are involved in and affected by 'the ways we do things around here'.

We make these points because most people have absorbed a lot of ideas about 'science' and 'research', some of it through studying various kinds of science, some of it through formal courses, and some simply by living in a culture that owes many of its benefits to advances in science. Many people have learned to think about science and research as a kind of method or machinery for producing 'truths'—a machine that uses valid and reliable measures and techniques to produce secure generalisations that hold everywhere, all things being equal. Critical participatory action research is *not* that kind of science. It aims to help us understand how things have come to be *here*, in our own sites and situations, and how we might want to change the way things are done here so we can avoid things that cause felt dissatisfactions for people here—dissatisfactions that are usually much greater for some people than others (for example, the teachers may be happy enough with the way things work around here, but the students are dissatisfied—or the two groups may be dissatisfied about different, and apparently unconnected, things). In critical participatory action research, we collect evidence and document our practices in order to learn how to overcome those felt dissatisfactions, not to produce The One Best Method for doing something. We want to transform things so we can do our best, under our circumstances—and, if our circumstances are unsatisfactory, to change those, too.

We are thus inclined to say that in critical participatory action research we are not so much interested in *data* (the scientists' word) as in *evidence* (the historian's word). We are interested in gathering evidence to show us how we are doing—and whether we are doing better than before—and we are interested in *documenting* the evidence so we can analyse and interpret it, reflect on it, share it with others involved or affected by what we do, and interrogate it in the public spheres we form whenever we form a critical participatory action research initiative. The 'right' evidence is not just one kind of evidence (like students' scores on standardised assessment tests, for example); it is 'right' because it provides answers for the particular kinds of questions we are asking, or because it throws light on the issue we are investigating. Mostly, the evidence we collect needs to be *compelling* for us, prompting us to think and re-think, but sometimes we will also want it to be compelling for others, too—so they can see why and how we have changed the ways we do things. What counts as 'compelling' is also something to be negotiated between participants, and with others to whom we may want to report. It is something to be determined collectively, in public spheres.

So this is another way critical participatory action research differs from some other forms of research: it works through *conversation* among those involved, not by speaking from some position of privilege (the privileged voice of the social scientist who is alleged to speak the truth, for example). It differs from forms of research that seek solely to answer questions and resolve problems; it aims to raise

questions, stimulate conversations and help people to change themselves, their practices, their understandings of their practices, and the conditions under which they practise. In critical participatory action research, we are co-producers of knowledge with our co-participants; we do not stand above them. In critical participatory action research, the world is not divided into the experts who get to tell others what works best and the others who get told. Instead, in critical participatory action research, participants are invited to join in the process of becoming the greatest experts in the world about how and why we do things *around here*—experts about *our* understandings, *our* practices, and the conditions under which *we* work.

We want to emphasise that, in critical participatory action research, it is not necessary to become a slave to 'data-collection' or a hostage to the methodological claims of validity and reliability. It *is* necessary, by contrast, to be careful about gathering and interpreting and analysing and interrogating evidence. The primary purpose of gathering evidence in the 'research' part of action research is to feed and nurture self-reflection about our practices, our understandings of our practices, and the conditions under which we practise—especially collective self-reflection in public spheres.

The most important evidence to collect will probably be what you collect in your *journal*. Make sure you keep a journal about what you do in your critical participatory action research—whether in notes, on loose sheets in a project file, in a blog, or an extended diary of your observations and reflections. And you should probably think about building a *portfolio*: a file (or file drawer, or a computer file) in which you collect many different types of evidence that allow you to *triangulate* (cross-refer and cross-check) across different *types* and different *sources* of evidence. You should make sure you collect evidence from different types of participants (teachers, students and parents, for example), and from the different perspectives we will outline in the next section.

In *Resource 6, Gathering evidence, documenting* in Chap. 7, we present a number of useful ways to collect evidence in critical participatory action research. The suggestions in *Resource 6* are just that: suggestions.

Research Perspectives in Critical Participatory Action Research

Critical participatory action research is fundamentally a 'practice changing practice' (Kemmis 2009). Its research perspective is different from other kinds of research for that reason. Following Kemmis and McTaggart (2005), we can say that all *conventional* kinds of social and educational research can be described using two dimensions:

1. the *individual-social* dimension: does the research focus on individuals or social structures, social patterns or arrangements across groups of people?
2. the *objective-subjective* dimension: does the research focus on and describe the behaviour of the participants(s) or emphasise the participants' own interpretations, emotions and intentions?

Table 4.1 Four perspectives on research

Focus: / *Perspective:*	**The individual**	**The social**
Objective	1	2
Subjective	3	4

Table 4.2 Five traditions of research on practice

Focus: / *Perspective:*	**The individual**	**The social**	**Both**
Objective	1	2	
Subjective	3	4	
Both			5

Taken together, these two dimensions yield four kinds of research: individual-objective, individual-subjective, social-objective, and social-subjective, as depicted in Table 4.1.

We can also think about a perspective that considers together all of these four standpoints, as we ordinarily do in social life. We often think about the behaviour or actions of individuals or of groups, and we often think about things from the perspective of an external observer in a way we might sometimes call 'objective' and we also think about things from the perspective of the one in some situation, from an insider, 'subjective' perspective. The five perspectives generated can be depicted as in Table 4.2. As it turns out, different researchers exploring practice have looked at practice from one or more of these five perspectives—indeed, there are whole traditions of research that explore practice from these five standpoints.

We can immediately see that thinking about educational practice might involve any or all of these things. A practice is made and remade daily based upon many observations.

Consider these obvservations:

1. A group of students researching environmental issues in a school observes a student putting an aluminium can (which is recyclable) into a general waste rubbish bin rather than the recyclables bin that is right alongside the general waste bin (*individual-objective*: information about the individual, from an observer's 'objective' perspective).
2. A group of students researching environmental issues at their school collect observations about whether senior students or junior students more frequently put recyclable waste and general waste into the right bins (*social-objective*: information about different social groups, from the observers' 'objective' perspective).

3. One of the students from the research group asks a student why he put recyclable waste into a general waste bin when there are signs clearly labelling each kind of bin, and the second replies "I didn't notice the sign saying that the other one was a recyclables bin" (*individual-subjective*: information about the individual, from that individual's 'subjective' perspective).
4. A group of students researching environmental issues at their school organise and record a debate—or a blog—about recycling in the school; they then analyse the arguments put for and against recycling to find out whether the different perspectives are based on different discourses—for example, whether some people speak the language of climate change and see waste as contributing to Greenhouse Gas emissions, while others think that the waste produced by packaging is just a normal part of consumption (*social-subjective*: information about groups, from the perspectives of members of the groups).
5. The group of students researching environmental issues at the school starts a recycling initiative at the school. By email, they inform all students and staff about special bins that have been provided for recyclable and general waste. They observe people's behaviour as they use the bins (putting rubbish in the appropriate bins or not) and they analyse the content of the bins to see what proportion of waste is being put in the right bins. They interview students and staff to discover their attitudes to, and satisfaction with, the recycling initiative. They explore people's comments over time, to see whether there is a shift in the language students and staff use in relation to the initiative—for example, to discover whether they are seeing the initiative as connected to other initiatives in the community, the city and the world to reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions. Then they invite interested students and staff to join a school environment club which will oversee the recycling initiative and begin other initiatives to work on other environmental issues at the school—like reducing energy consumption, reducing photocopying, improving purchasing practices to favour 'greener' products, and using grey water on school gardens (*All*: the students and staff involved are both observers of these practices and the ones who practise them; and they are interested both in the behaviour and views of individuals who participate in the practices, and in the spread of 'green' practices and the specialist discourses of climate change and Greenhouse Gas emissions abatement throughout the school.)

In the first four of these activities, the students are behaving like different kinds of conventional researchers who observe the behaviour of people and groups, and who try to reach understandings of the particular perspectives of individuals and groups.

In the fifth activity, however, the students move out of these conventional research positions and invite others to become co-researchers with them, as well as co-participants in changing their accepted, everyday practices of consumption and recycling and Greenhouse Gas emissions abatement. They invite others to join them in the process of transforming their practices, their understandings of their practices, and the conditions under which they practice. They invite other students and staff to join them as co-participants in a process of transforming themselves, their school, their community and the world. And they do this by creating an environment club that can be a public sphere in which environmental issues in the school can be

explored with an eye to preventing, avoiding or ameliorating issues of unsustainability in the school, the community and the world.

Critical Participatory Action Research as a Kind of Research

We now move from the example to revisit the same ideas about research perspectives using a more formal discourse. Kemmis and McTaggart (2000, 2005) provided a framework showing how practice is viewed in different research traditions as:

1. the individual performances, events and effects which constitute practice as it is viewed from the 'objective', external perspective of an outsider (how the practitioner's individual behaviour appears to an outside observer—*individual-objective*);
2. the wider social and material conditions and interactions which constitute a social practice as it is viewed from the 'objective', external perspective of an outsider (how the patterns of social interaction among those involved in the practice appear to an outside observer—*social-objective*);
3. the intentions, meanings and values which constitute practice as it is viewed from the 'subjective', internal perspective of individual practitioners themselves (the way individual practitioners' intentional actions appear to them as individual cognitive subjects — *individual-subjective*);
4. the language, discourses and traditions which constitute practice as it is viewed from the 'subjective', internal social perspective of members of the participants' own discourse community who must represent (describe, interpret, evaluate) practices in order to talk about and develop them, as happens, for example, in the discourse communities of professions (how the language of practice appears to communities of practitioners as they represent their practices to themselves and others—*social-subjective*); and
5. the change and evolution of practice, taking into account all four of the aspects of practice just mentioned, which comes into view when it is understood by participants as reflexively restructured and transformed over time, in its historical dimension.

The first four of these perspectives on practice lead to familiar research approaches and techniques (see Table 4.3). Our interest is the fifth perspective, which creates challenges by being more than a research approach; it does not stand back from practice but joins in the action, helping to reconstitute practice through informed, collective human agency. The goal is the immediate and continuing betterment of practice rather than merely being informed about practice. Because changing practice is the focus, we must put ourselves into the workplace and consider what kinds of information we (and others) might need. We need to take into account not just what people might think about the current situation, but how they might respond if we begin to initiate changes. This requires an understanding of individual views and shared social understandings. Even objectively established facts such as the number of students who speak languages other than English in a class will involve different

Table 4.3 Views of practice and the research approaches they imply

Focus: / Perspective:	The individual	The social	Both: a reflexive-dialectical view of individual-social relations and connections
Objective	(1) *Practice as individual behaviour:* Quantitative, correlational-experimental methods. Psychometric and observational techniques, tests, interaction schedules.	(2) *Practice as social and systems behaviour:* Quantitative, correlational-experimental methods. Observational techniques, sociometrics, systems analysis.	
Subjective	(3) *Practice as intentional action:* Qualitative, interpretive methods. Clinical analysis, interview, questionnaire, diaries, journals, self-report, introspection	(4) *Practice as socially-structured, shaped by discourses and tradition:* Qualitative, interpretive, historical methods. Discourse analysis, document analysis.	
Both: a reflexive dialectical view of subjective-objective relations and connections			(5) *Practice as socially- and historically-constituted, and as reconstituted by human agency and social action by participants:* Critical methods. Critical participatory action research that reflexively combines multiple methods —.

subjective reactions. The individual, social, objective and subjective perspectives in the situation must be taken into account, if we are to do something.

In one sense, the Perspective 5 takes an 'aerial view' of the four other approaches, and instead of fragmenting into each of the four respective specialisations of 'method', it considers them together. As we have suggested, the fifth perspective is much closer to life than the others. When we engage in a social practice like education, the practice bubbles along apace as observations from all perspectives are made about what is going on in the classroom. Perspective 5 engages the kinds of questions each perspective addresses, but in a somewhat different way. It does not anticipate as its primary goal the distillation of a study of the situation but instead concentrates on changing participants' understandings, their practices, and the situation in which these are constituted. Each of these, understanding, practice and the situation have been formed in particular historical, material and political settings and it is theoretical insight from critical social science which helps to guide reflection and action.

We can begin to tie these five standpoints in research together with the view of practices presented in Chapter Three. These begin to suggest ways we can look at people's *sayings* in and about their practices, and the *cultural-discursive arrangements* that make their practices possible; how we might look at the *doings* of people's practices, and the *material-economic arrangements* that resource and support what they do; and how we might look at the *relatings* of their practices, and the *social-political arrangements* that make possible those ways of relating to one another and the world. Table 4.4 suggests that it is possible to collect evidence about all of these things from each of these five standpoints.

For example, in cell (1) of Table 4.4, in which practice is viewed as individual behaviour (from the *individual-objective* standpoint), we might collect evidence about the *sayings* and the *cultural-discursive arrangements* that make those sayings possible by counting the number of times a person uses a particular word, or by collecting information about people's attitudes using a multiple-choice questionnaire in which respondents tick boxes corresponding to the view (for example, about statements to do with climate change) closest to their own view. An example of collecting evidence about people's *doings* and the *material-economic arrange-*

Table 4.4 Collecting evidence about practices and practice architectures from different standpoints

Focus: / **Perspective:**	**The individual** (like practices, as we define them)	**The social** (like practice architectures, as we define them)	**Both: Reflexive-dialectical view of individual-social relations and connections**
Objective	(1) *Practice as individual behaviour.* • Sayings and cultural-discursive arrangements • Doings and material-economic arrangements • Relatings and social-political arrangements	(2) *Practice as social and systems behaviour:* • Sayings and cultural-discursive arrangements • Doings and material-economic arrangements • Relatings and social-political arrangements	
Subjective	(3) *Practice as intentional action:* • Sayings and cultural-discursive arrangements • Doings and material-economic arrangements • Relatings and social-political arrangements	(4) *Practice as socially-structured, shaped by discourses and tradition:* • Sayings and cultural-discursive arrangements • Doings and material-economic arrangements • Relatings and social-political arrangements	
Both: Reflexive-dialectical view of subjective-objective relations and connections			(5) *Practice as socially- and historically-constituted, and as reconstituted by human agency and social action by participants:* • Sayings and cultural-discursive arrangements • Doings and material-economic arrangements • Relatings and social-political arrangements

ments that make those doings possible would be if we counted the number of times students put recyclable and general waste into the right bins. An example of collecting evidence about the *relatings* and the *social-political arrangements* that make those relatings possible would be counting the number of times in a lesson that each student in a class interacts with each other student.

We might collect evidence in cell (2) of the Table, in which practices are understood as social or systems behaviour (the *social-objective* standpoint), in similar ways, but in this case, we might focus more on the behaviour (sayings, doings, relatings) of groups rather than individuals—for example, collecting evidence about *doings* by *mapping* the spaces in a high school playground occupied by young men versus young women at different Year levels.

We might collect evidence in cell (3), in which practices are understood as the intentional actions of participants (the *individual-subjective* standpoint), by such means as *unstructured interviews* with students to discover the ways they interpret things (*sayings*)—their views about climate change, for example.

We might collect evidence in cell (4), in which practices are understood as socially-structured, shaped by discourses and traditions (the *social-subjective* standpoint), by such means as *analysing policy documents*, particularly the discourses used in policy documents—for example to throw light whether a school is implementing a state education department's policies about schools and energy use or waste management.

When we come to collect evidence in cell (5), however, we begin to be collecting evidence about *changes over time*, documenting what we say and do, and how we relate to others and the world, and monitoring whether we are preventing, avoiding or ameliorating the untoward consequences of our practices. In this case, we need a range of different kinds of evidence, and to be triangulating across different kinds and sources of evidence: different kinds, from different standpoints; and different

sources, from different people or groups, for example. In cell (5), we are not seeing people's individual or collective views or activities or relationships as static, but rather as dynamic—as changing over time. In critical participatory action research, we change our practices in pursuit of better ways of doing things in the sense that they are less irrational, less unsustainable, and less unjust. So we are not studying *the same* practices and practice architectures over time, but *different*, *changing* practices and practice architectures.

In critical participatory action research, we aim to locate ourselves principally in the fifth standpoint in Table 4.4. We might nevertheless want to collect some observations and evidence from the first four standpoints, to see ourselves as others see us. This evidence helps us to enter the living dialectic of exploring the relationships between (a) our *individual* actions, understandings, and relationships with others, and (b) how our actions and understandings and relationships are part of—and help to construct—the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements that enable and constrain our *collective* practices in (for example) a community, a school, a classroom, or a staff room. Connecting, comparing and contrasting views in the *individual-social* (or individual-collective) dimension creates a dialogue between things we experience *individually* and things we experience *collectively*. Kemmis et al. (2014, especially Chaps. 1 and 2) describe what we experience collectively in terms of the *intersubjective spaces*—semantic space, physical space-time, and social space—in which we encounter one another.

Similarly, connecting, comparing and contrasting evidence in the *objective-subjective* dimension from the first four standpoints also helps us to enter the living dialectic between so-called '*objective*' observations about what we say and do and how we relate to others and the world, on the one hand, and, on the other, people's so-called '*subjective*' understandings, interpretations and perspectives of their practices: creating a dialogue between how others see us and how we see ourselves—a dialogue between *self* and *other*.

Let us now consider in more detail how we participate in the research part of critical participatory action research—working in cell (5) in Table 4.4. In the next sections, first, we will discuss what it means to conduct research *within a practice tradition*, and then we will draw on the concepts about practice and practice architectures developed in Chap. 3 to map the kinds of questions we address as participants in critical action research.

Researching Practice from within Practice Traditions

We have argued that

- the 'research' part of critical participatory action research focuses on studying the nature and consequences of our own practices, our understandings of our practices and the conditions under which we practise;
- in critical participatory action research we study the nature and consequences of our practices not as sole researchers but as participants in public spheres in

which we deliberate about and explore felt concerns about the nature and consequences of what we do, together with others involved in and affected by our practices;
- our practices, our understandings, and the conditions under which we practice, have all been historically formed by our own and others' actions in the past that have persisted into the present, as well as by circumstances formed in the past that may or may not persist into the present;
- we will continue to reproduce our practices, understandings and these conditions in their current forms—that is, that our practices, our understandings, and existing conditions will persist into the future—unless we change them, or unless something or someone else intervenes to disrupt them;
- in critical participatory action research, we aim to take individual and collective (and, in the case of professional practices, professional) responsibility for the formation and transformation of our own practices—that is, we aim to take responsibility for our own practices whether or not others may also intervene to disrupt them or to propose that we do things differently;
- by 'taking responsibility for our own practices,' we mean taking responsibility for how our practices are done, and for their consequences;
- to avert or avoid producing untoward consequences, we therefore take a critical view of the nature and consequences of our practices, our understandings, and the conditions under which we practise; and that
- 'taking a critical view' means interrogating and exploring our practices, our understandings and the conditions under which we practise to discover (a) whether the nature and consequences of our ideas about what we are doing are rational and reasonable, (b) whether the nature and consequences of what we do are productive and sustainable, and (c) whether the nature and consequences of how we relate to others are just and inclusive.

In critical participatory action research, we see our practices as located not just in abstract time and abstract space, but as embodied and located in people's bodies and biographies, and in shared local histories, and in what people do and how what they do is enmeshed with the particularities of the local sites—the places—where they live and work and interact. As demonstrated by Kemmis et al. (2014), we see practices as enmeshed with practice architectures that hold them in place in sites, and as changing and (perhaps) evolving through local and broader histories. As these authors also demonstrate, we see practices as formed in *intersubjective space*—shaped in shared *semantic space* where we encounter one another in shared language, in shared *physical space-time* in which we encounter one another in a shared material reality, and in shared *social space* in which we encounter one another amid pre-existing relationships of power and solidarity. One might say, then, that critical participatory action research aims at transforming intersubjective space—the ways we encounter one another—and transforming the ways that semantic space, physical space-time, and social space overlap and are bundled together by the ways we act and interact with others and the world. By the ways we act and interact with others and the world *in our practices*, we open up one particular kind of intersubjective space rather than another; in doing so, we both reproduce (in some respects) and

transform (in other respects) the shapes of intersubjective spaces we have opened up in the past. In Braxton High School's recycling project, for example, participants reproduced some aspects of previously existing intersubjective spaces (putting rubbish into bins in the school, for example), but they also transformed other aspects of those spaces (acting differently by separating recyclable and general waste and putting them into different bins, and thus relating differently to the world, for example). They changed the ways their practices shaped broader intersubjective spaces in the world—especially by changing the ways people, not only in the school, but in the wider community live together, recycling waste in order to improve the sustainability of the Earth's resources, and to help mitigate human-induced climate change and the production of Greenhouse Gases.

Seeing our practices, our understandings and the conditions under which we practise as historically-formed and as transformable through individual and social action, and seeing them as shaped in the intersubjective spaces in which we encounter one another and the world, allows us to see our practices, understandings and conditions as malleable rather than as fixed and final. It allows us to see how, through our agency, we will reproduce our practices, understandings and conditions unless we take steps to transform them. It allows us to see that, when these things (our practices, understandings and conditions) are irrational or unreasonable, unproductive or unsustainable, or unjust or exclusive, they are likely to remain so, unless we—or others or other circumstances—intervene to transform them.

Thus, the students at Braxton High School found a way to intervene in the life of their school and community to transform some of the local conditions that are producing human-induced climate change—on the side of sustainability and against unsustainability. They intervened in history to 'make a difference'. The kind of local change Braxton High School students made has been multiplied thousands-fold around the globe by local climate action groups and local government authorities who are transforming waste management by introducing recycling initiatives of various kinds. Their local change made them part of a vast intersubjective space which is, in fact, a global social movement and part of a widely-shared global consciousness—as is demonstrated by the Braxton students' participation in climate change meetings and conferences that are connected to provincial, national and international climate change networks.

Many action researchers feel overwhelmed by the apparent intractability of major social and environmental issues—issues of race, gender, or climate change, for example. "Even if we can produce small changes here, in our place," they say, "we can't change the world." Our response is to say that to make such local changes *is* to change the world—as is demonstrated by Braxton High School's participation in the global response to human-induced climate change: not a glass half empty but half full; not a counsel of despair but resources for hope.

To see our practices as making and remaking the world of yesterday, in the world of today, with more or less predictable consequences for how we will live in the world of tomorrow, is to see our practices as existing in *practice traditions*. Sometimes these are very local—'the way we do things around here'—or even individual—'the way*I*do things'. Sometimes, however, our practices are formed and transformed (sometimes glacially slowly) by *institutions*—the practice of class-

room teaching in schools, for example, which has been formed and transformed over millennia in a slow dance in which successive generations of practitioners of teaching have shaped and been shaped by successive forms of the institutions of schooling. Sometimes, and sometimes in different directions, our practices are also formed and transformed by the slow dance in which successive generations of practitioners—teachers, physicians, nurses, administrators—shape and are shaped by the various institutions and communicative spaces created by *professions*—like teachers' unions, or teachers' professional associations, or research associations (like the *Collaborative Action Research Network*, for example). As Kemmis et al. (2014; see especially Chap. 8, 'Researching as a practice-changing practice' and Chap. 9, 'Revitalising education: Site based education development') argue, there is a permanent contest between institutions and practices. In the field of education, there is a constant struggle between the institutions of schooling and practices of education. For every historical era, we must ask, "Is *this* way of doing schooling *educational*, or is it non-educational or even anti-educational?"

When we see practices—especially professional practices like teaching or nursing or management—this way, we can also see ourselves as the *stewards* of these practices for our time, at our historical moment, for the time we participate in the life and work of the profession. We begin to recognise that, together with other practitioners of the profession, we share a moral, social, political and professional duty for the conduct of the practice of the profession in our time. It is up to us—along with others in the profession—to judge whether and how, in our time, schooling is becoming non-educational or anti-educational, or whether and how it is becoming more richly educational. Especially at a time when large public sector professions like teaching are coming under increased bureaucratic regulation and surveillance, there is a danger that curricula, pedagogies and forms of assessment become less educational rather than more, particularly in an era when education systems are becoming systems whose principal functions, apparently, are the administration, management and surveillance of teachers and students, rather than the *education* of students and teachers. As contributors to the Kemmis and Smith (2008) volume *Enabling Praxis* argued, this is a time when many teachers feel themselves to be the de-professionalised operatives of systems of schooling, rather than professionals who are, in their own right, agents of education.

Critical participatory action research is intended to be a remedy for the malady of de-professionalisation. In the field of education, it is an invitation to local re-professionalisation of education and local revitalisation of education by teachers, students and others. It invites participants to interrogate the extent to which their practices are *educational*, as well as rational and reasonable, productive and sustainable, and just and inclusive. And it invites them to make transformations of their practices, their understandings of their practices, and the conditions under which they practise, to ensure that they and their colleagues will be practising education—and not just schooling—in their local settings. It invites them to engage in education as a double process of helping students to live well, and helping to form a world worth living in.

On this view, then, the 'research' part of critical participatory action research in education is not just any kind of research. It is research both *within practice*

traditions and *for education*. It is committed to sustaining education as a form of human and social practice in an era when the institutions and the bureaucratic procedures of schooling threaten to overwhelm education as a lifeworld process. It is committed to sustaining education as the particular profession practised by people whose specific vocation is initiating people into other kinds of practices (like plumbing, mathematics, history, hairdressing, and the rest) which will extend the individual and collective powers of self-expression, self-development, and self-determination of the people involved.

If this is an answer to the question of *why* one might become involved in critical participatory action research, the next section invites you to consider *what* the focus of a shared critical participatory action research initiative in your setting might be.

Using the Practice Architectures Analysis Table to Find a Felt Concern that will be the Focus of a Critical Participatory Action Research Initiative

Table 4.5 below presents a matrix for analysing the relationships between practices and the practice architectures (cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements) that make them possible in a particular site. (By the way, the questions that were used to create Table 3.1 in Chap. 3, describing Braxton High School's recycling project, came from Table 4.5.) When using this practice architectures analysis table as a way to begin exploring what issues or concerns might provide a focus for shared research and action, it is important to note that *different participants* (and others involved and affected by the practice) may answer the questions in the Table differently about themselves and about others. It is important to understand whether and how these differences form patterns. For example, do people's different view reflect differences in their roles, or rights and responsibilities, or backgrounds?

It is also important to note that you will use Table 4.5 not just at the start of a critical participatory action research initiative but also as you go along afterwards—to capture *how things change* through your efforts and the efforts of your fellow critical participatory action researchers. Thus, we can ask variants of the same questions to explore *past*, *present* and *future* practices. For example, we can ask about people's *previous* sayings, doings and relatings and the projects that formerly held their practices together; their *current* sayings, doings, relatings and projects; and their *future* intended sayings, doings, relatings and projects.

Different *critical questions* arise in relation to sayings, doings and relatings and the arrangements that make them possible and hold them in place. As you work through Table 4.5, answering the questions, you will already be beginning an analysis of practices and practice architectures in the site.

- In relation to *sayings* and the *cultural-discursive arrangements* in the site, we can always ask, "Are these *rational* and *reasonable*?" By 'rational and reasonable,'

Table 4.5 Investigating practices and the practice architectures that support them

Elements of practices	Practice architectures
Project	*Practice landscape*
What do participants—including myself and others—say they are doing, or intend to do, or have done? (Note: different participants and others may answer this question differently.)	How do different participants (and others involved or affected) inhabit the site in different ways, that is, interact with different people and objects, and occupy different places and spaces in the site as a whole?
Sayings (*communication in semantic space*)	*Cultural-discursive arrangements* (*Note: one person's sayings are also practice architectures that enable or constrain others' sayings*)
What do different participants say in the practice as they do it (what language is used, especially specialised language used in this practice)?	Where does this language or specialist discourse come from (e.g., texts, policies, professional communities, language communities)?
What ideas are most important to different participants?	Who speaks this language in the site? Who speaks it most/least fluently?
What language and ideas do different participants use about the practice (especially to describe, explain, and justify the practice before or after they do it)?	Is there contestation among people involved or affected about language, or key ideas or importance?
How are different participants' language and ideas changing?	
Doings (*activities, often producing or achieving something, in physical space-time*)	*Material-economic arrangements* (*Note: one person's doings may enable or constrain others' doings*)
What are participants doing?	What physical spaces are being occupied (over time)?
Are there sequences or connections between activities?	Are particular kinds of set-ups of objects involved?
Are ends or outcomes being achieved?	What material and financial resources are involved? (Are the resources adequate?)
Relatings (*relationships in social space*, *especially relationships of power and solidarity*)	*Social-political arrangements*
How do participants (and others involved or affected) relate to one another?	What social and administrative systems of roles, responsibilities, functions, obligations, and reporting relationships enable and constrain relationships in the site?
Are there systems of positions, roles or functions? Are relationships of power involved?	Do people collaborate or compete for resources (or regard)? Is there resistance, conflict or contestation?
	Is the communicative space a public sphere?
Who is included and excluded from what?	
Are there relationships of solidarity and belonging (shared purposes)?	
Dispositions (*habitus*; the interactive capabilities of different participants)	*Practice traditions*
Understandings: How do participants understand what is happening?	What do our observations tell us about practice traditions in the site, in the sense of 'the way we do things around here'?

Table 4.5 (continued)

Elements of practices	Practice architectures
Skills: What skills and capacities are participants using?	Is there evidence of professional practice traditions (not exclusive to this site)—like following an inquiry approach in science teaching, or following a state policy—and do these enable or constrain what participants hope to achieve in this site?
Values: What are participants' values, commitments and norms relevant to the practice (concerning the people and things involved)?	

in general, we mean that people's ideas and what they say are comprehensible, coherent, accurate, sincerely stated (not deceptive), and morally right and appropriate.

- In relation to *doings* and the *material-economic arrangements* in the site, we can always ask, "Are these productive and sustainable?" By 'productive and sustainable,' in general, we mean that the practices produce worthwhile outcomes that are satisfying for the people concerned, and that they do not waste valuable resources (including time and energy as well as material resources), or cause harm or suffering.
- In relation to relatings and the social-political arrangements in the site, we can always ask, "Are these just and inclusive?" In terms of justice, we can ask whether the practices and social-political arrangements in the site involve power relationships of domination or oppression (Young 1990), and in terms of inclusion or exclusion, we can ask whether relationships in the site foster solidarity, belonging and inclusion, or instead whether they cause conflict or exclusion.

It is good critical participatory action research practice to note what evidence you are drawing on to answer the questions in Table 4.5. For example, you might note where and when the practice occurred and who was involved, and the nature of the evidence you were considering, for example, a recorded conversation among participants, notes from a meeting, a focus group interview with students, a policy document, or an audiotape or transcript.

Each of these questions leads to evidence about what is happening in the practice, in the view of all participants and those involved and affected. The evidence provides the basis of individual and collective reflection about what to do in the site in light of increasing understanding, suggesting for discussion new sayings, doings and relating and ways of engaging the practice architectures to make them more conducive to rational, sustainable and socially just practices.

How much and what kinds of evidence do we need? We need to consider each of the general questions posed, and to reduce our initial day-to-day dependence on our own informal observations. However, we need also to not get bogged down in a sea of 'data' that interferes with our work. One of the key tasks of critical participatory action research is getting this balance right. In *Chap. 5: Doing critical participatory action research: The planner part,* we develop in more detail the actual practice of

participating in the joint, simultaneous task of both changing and informing practice in disciplined ways.

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