

# Chapter 7

## Resources for Critical Participatory Action Researchers

### Resource 1: Creating a Public Sphere and Identifying a Shared Felt Concern

A dilemma confronts anyone thinking of beginning a critical participatory action research initiative: you cannot decide *what* to research until you know *who* will be doing the research, and you cannot know *who* will be doing the research until you know *what to research*. This is a dilemma peculiar to critical participatory action research. Other action research begins with single individuals deciding to research something that is a felt concern for them. Still other action research begins with a community—a group of participants—and leaves it to them to decide what to work on—a community development project conducted as an action research initiative, for example. A critical participatory action researcher cannot begin a project entirely on her or his own without risking excluding relevant others from the process, yet you cannot form a group to decide what to work on without having some theme in mind around which a research group might reasonably form.

This is why, in this book, we have placed so much emphasis on *participation* and the idea of a *public sphere* in critical participatory action research. We think a critical participatory action research initiative begins with a *conversation*. The conversation could last just an hour or two, or it could take place in weekly sessions over weeks or months: it needs to be an open conversation, in which different voices are heard. As indicated in the features of public spheres outlined in Chap. 2, the conversation also needs to be open in the sense that, as they choose, people can be speakers, listeners, and observers of the conversation, and they can also withdraw from the conversation. And others can join.

What is the conversation that initiates a critical participatory research initiative about? In our view, the conversation that begins a critical participatory action research initiative has the sole aim of discovering a *shared felt concern* that participants believe to be something that is (a) *worth investigating* and (b) *worth acting on*. A concern is worth investigating if we are as yet unsure about such things as how a situation came about, or how our practices have consequences that are untoward in some way—for example, by maintaining views that are *irrational* (or unreasonable, incomprehensible, or incoherent), or activities that are *unproductive*

or *unsustainable*, or relationships between people or between people and the world that are *unjust* (or serve the interests of some people at the expense of others, or that cause conflict, or exclusion, or threaten solidarity between people). A concern is worth acting on if our action will avert or avoid or ameliorate those kinds of consequences (irrationality, unsustainability, injustice), in the interests of the people involved and, in the very big picture, in the interests of the human community and the well-being of the planet.

Who should be invited to join the conversation? In our view, this is a very sensitive question. Answering it requires wisdom (good sense), prudence (so we can proceed safely and securely), and courage (so we can work on the kinds of troublesome issues that have important effects on people's lives). In many situations—in schools, for example—the tradition of practitioner inquiry is not yet well established. There may not be a tradition in which teachers freely discuss their teaching practices with one another, or the consequences of the differences in their teaching practices for different groups of students, for example. In such a setting, it may be sufficient to have a few teachers join the conversation, just to begin the process of making their practices open to one another for constructively critical deliberation.

In other situations, the tradition of teacher inquiry is better established, and teachers are willing to share experiences and practices, and to work together to develop teaching practices that more richly nurture student learning. In some settings like this, students frequently participate in the research process only as people ('research subjects') whose learning is observed, and whose opinions or views are sought—for example, in reflective self-evaluation sessions at the end of a lesson, or via focus group interviews. In this kind of case, students have not yet become full partners in the research process who are co-participants alongside their teachers or school administrators.

In some situations where participant inquiry is better understood, however, teachers and principals *do* invite students to become part of the public sphere of a critical participatory action research initiative, to consider the kinds of issues or problems that might form the heart of a collective action research project involving students along with teachers and others. This may be where courage is needed—to open the communicative space to include those groups who are excluded when the conversation is a conversation just among teachers (desirable though teachers-only conversations may be for collective professional learning and collective professional practice development).

Groups of this third kind—including students, ancillary staff, the principal and some community members—were formed at Braxton High School (see Chap. 6, Example 1). The recycling project group, for example, included students, teachers, custodians, the principal, district consultants and some parents. We believe that these are the best kinds of groups for critical participatory action research, because they cross some important boundaries, especially the boundaries of people's *perspectives*, their *power*, and their *self-interests*. In a public sphere composed of people in different roles (like teacher, student, principal, parent) we have the opportunity to see the life and work of classrooms and schools from very different perspectives, among people with greater or lesser power to determine how things can and should be done, and among people who have rather different and some-

times competing self-interests. The teacher's self-interests might include keeping a job and developing a career; the student's self-interests might include enjoying participation in learning and developing knowledge and skills and values for a satisfying life; the principal's self-interests might include sustaining and developing the school and its community; and the parent's self-interests might include seeing a child thrive developmentally, intellectually and socially.

In education, people may be bound together in their lives and work by interconnecting practices—practices of *student learning*, practices of *teaching*, practices of *professional learning*, practices of *leading* (by students as well as teachers and principals and District or state staff), and practices of *researching*, sometimes interconnected with one another together in what Kemmis et al. (2014) call “*ecologies of practices*”. These practices are *distributed* and *orchestrated*: they involve different kinds of people in different roles, giving them different kinds of opportunities to determine the course of how practices unfold, with different kinds of consequences that serve the self-interests of different people and groups in different ways. People are necessarily linked together with one another through these practices in the life and work of schools and education; in critical participatory action research, we try to form public spheres in which people with different roles and diverse perspectives can be linked together to reflect about the nature and consequences of their practices as they emerge in the life and work of schools and societies—consequences for themselves and for others; consequences that serve the self-interests of some people sometimes at the expense of the self-interests of others.

In Example 1 in Chap. 6, the recycling project at Braxton High School, students reflected concerns of parents and others in their community about climate change and Greenhouse Gas emissions abatement. They noticed how the school's practices contributed to Greenhouse Gas emissions through the consequences of waste management practices that paid no attention to recycling. As indicated in Chap. 2, the students had identified a *legitimation deficit*—they noticed that waste management practices in the school lacked legitimacy because they contributed to Greenhouse Gas emissions and climate change. They concluded that their existing practices as a school were *unsustainable*. This was a *collective felt concern*; it was *an issue worth investigating*; and it would lead to *action worth taking* on behalf of the human community and the planet.

With the encouragement of the principal and teachers and district consultants, the students formed a group to think about the problem—a group that included the people involved in different ways in the existing practices that contributed to avoidable Greenhouse Gas emissions: students and members of the Student Council who could galvanise the student body, teachers with expertise in issues of climate change, the custodians who were responsible for waste management in the school, the principal who could oversee the distribution of resources and responsibilities to support new practices of recycling in the school, and district consultants with expertise in critical participatory action research and environmental education, including Education for Sustainability. By involving these different groups in the conversation about the nature of the problem and what could be done about it, they established new ways of working in the school—new ways that stepped outside taken for granted role relationships, and established new ways for people to relate to one another. To a greater

or lesser extent, participants began to relate to one another as people with equal and equally redeemable rights to participate as speakers and hearers and observers in the communicative space of a shared public sphere. They began to relate to one another in ways that were different from taken for granted ‘school’ relationships. Partly by overthrowing or suspending those taken for granted ‘school’ practices (like student compliance to teachers’ directions), they established *new practices*—new practices of recycling, new practices of researching and documenting and monitoring their progress, and new practices of communicating in a public sphere. As suggested in Chap. 2, they exercised *communicative freedom* and, by doing so, they generated *communicative power*. They were able to convince everyone involved in the waste management practices of the school (students and teachers putting waste in appropriate bins, custodians handling recyclable and non-recyclable waste, the principal managing the school) that the new practices would be better than the old practices because they were more sustainable locally and for the planet. More than this, the students were also invited to speak in other forums regionally and nationally to share their findings with other schools and other students and teachers and administrators. They became active participants in a worldwide social movement for local action towards Greenhouse Gas abatement, to address the global problem of climate change.

### ***Identifying Educational Legitimation Deficits***

Critical participatory action researchers in education might also want to consider the question of whether some kind of *educational* legitimation deficit exists in their educational setting. You could begin by considering questions like the ones listed in Chap. 5, where we suggested you ask whether your current practices, and the practice architectures of your educational institutions, unreasonably limit and constrain

1. the ways different people and groups (for example, teachers, students, administrators, community members) understand things, and their relative opportunities for individual and collective self-expression (for example, by unreasonably limiting their opportunities to encounter particular kinds of knowledge, or their rights of free speech<sup>1</sup>),
2. the ways different people and groups are able to do things, and their relative opportunities for individual and collective self-development (for example, by unreasonably limiting their opportunities to do particular kinds of things or to develop particular kinds of skills and capabilities), and
3. the ways different people and groups are able to relate to one another and the world, and their relative opportunities for self-determination (for example, by unreasonably limiting their opportunities to decide for themselves what their educational opportunities should be, or their opportunities to live certain kinds of lives, or their rights of free association).

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<sup>1</sup> The right of free speech does not include a right to defame or vilify other people or groups.

As we indicated in Chap. 5, different people and groups may disagree about what counts as ‘reasonable’ or ‘unreasonable’ when they consider these questions, and, in some extreme cases, people are locked into opposed positions, and unwilling to discuss other ways of understanding things, other ways of doing things, or other ways of relating to others and the world. These are the very kinds of situations to which critical participatory action research is a valid and legitimate response—though whether it will also turn out to be wise and prudent will depend on how participants proceed. The challenge for critical participatory action research is to widen conversations about social and educational concerns to include different kinds of people and groups with different kinds of perspectives and self-interests, in a way that recognises and respects differences while nevertheless seeking unforced consensus about ways around or through them.

### ***Identifying More General Legitimation Deficits***

We now invite you to turn to Table 7.1 (previously introduced as Table 4.5 in Chap. 4) and Table 7.2 (introduced as Table 5.1 in Chap. 5) as two points of departure for identifying a shared felt concern and establishing a critical participatory action research group. First, invite people in the setting to think about the kinds of questions posed in Table 7.1—do these questions prompt any ideas about what could be a shared felt concern that could be a starting point for a critical participatory action research initiative?

Now refer to Table 7.2. You might want to focus particularly on the rows of Table 7.2 to do with the *sayings*, *doings* and *relatings* that constitute practices in your setting, and the *cultural-discursive*, *material-economic* and *social-political* arrangements that hold existing practices in place in the school. These are the rows of the table where the big questions arise: questions of rationality and irrationality, sustainability and unsustainability, questions of justice and injustice. These are also matters about which people need to communicate with the greatest respect and civility.

When you begin the conversation, try to remain open to other views and directions as you explore the questions in Table 7.2: don’t rush the process of identifying and settling on a shared concern. You need to find a concern that is widely shared, and capable of generating sufficient commitment from a group of people—commitment to putting sustained action and sustained research into working on this concern.

It is also extremely important to proceed sensitively. You may want to refer now, before you go further, to three other Resources presented in this Chapter: *Resource 2*, which presents some notes on research ethics for critical participatory action researchers; *Resource 3*, which outlines some protocols for critical participatory action research groups; and *Resource 4*, which gives some principles of procedure for people doing critical participatory action research. These will help to orient you as

Table 7.1 Investigating practices and the practice architectures that support them

Elements of practices		Practice architectures
<i>Project</i>		<i>Practice landscape</i>
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?	
<i>Sayings (communication in semantic space)</i>		<i>Cultural-discursive arrangements (Note: one person's sayings are also practice architectures that enable or constrain others' sayings)</i>
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?		<i>Material-economic arrangements (Note: one person's doings may enable or constrain others' doings)</i>
<i>Doings (activities, often producing or achieving something, in physical space-time)</i>	What are participants doing?	What physical spaces are being occupied (over time)?
Are there sequences or connections between activities?	Are intended ends or outcomes being achieved?	Are particular kinds of set-ups of objects involved?
		What material and financial resources are involved? (Are the resources adequate?)
		<i>Social-political arrangements</i>
<i>Relatings (relationships in social space, especially relationships of power and solidarity)</i>		What social and administrative systems of roles, responsibilities, functions, obligations, and reporting relationships enable and constrain relationships in the site?
How do participants (and others involved or affected) relate to one another?		Do people collaborate or compete for resources (or regard)? Is there resistance, conflict or contestation?
Are there systems of positions, roles or functions? Are relationships of power involved?		Is the communicative space a public sphere?
Who is included and excluded from what?		<i>Practice traditions</i>
Are there relationships of solidarity and belonging (shared purposes)?		What do our observations tell us about practice traditions in the site, in the sense of 'the way we do things around here'?
<i>Dispositions (habitus; the interactive capabilities of different participants)</i>		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?
<i>Understandings</i> : How do participants understand what is happening?		
<i>Skills</i> : What skills and capacities are participants using?		
<i>Values</i> : What are participants' values, commitments and norms relevant to the practice (concerning the people and things involved)?		

**Table 7.2** Reconnaissance: Identifying a collective felt concern using the theory of practice architectures

<b>Elements of practices</b>	<b>Practice architectures</b>
<i>The project of our practice</i>	<i>The practice tradition in which our practice occurs</i>
Does this <i>practice</i> (like the practice of teaching students how to write expository texts, or our recycling practices at school, for example) produce untoward— <i>irrational, unsustainable, unjust</i> —consequences for anyone involved or affected? Are we all equally satisfied with our current practice? Or, if not, have we identified a shared felt concern? Do we all understand what we are currently doing here—the <i>project of our practice</i> —in the same way?	Does this <i>practice tradition</i> (for example, an overall practice tradition of education or literacy education, or a practice tradition of using non-renewable resources), within which our current practice happens, produce untoward consequences? Are we all equally satisfied with it? Or, if not, have we identified a shared felt concern? Do we all understand our practice tradition in the same way?
<i>Sayings</i>	<i>Cultural-discursive arrangements</i>
In relation to our current practices (the ways we do things around here), is what is said (and thought) in this practice and this situation (including what is taken for granted in this situation) <i>rational</i> in the sense that it is reasonable, coherent, comprehensible, accurate, sincerely stated, and morally right and appropriate? Or is there evidence that what is said and thought is <i>irrational</i> in the sense that it is unreasonable, contradictory, incoherent, incomprehensible, inaccurate, insincerely stated (or deceptive), or <i>not</i> morally right and appropriate? Do different people have different views about whether what is said and thought in this situation is rational rather than irrational?	In relation to our current practices (the ways we do things around here), is what is said (and thought) in this practice and this situation (including what is taken for granted in this situation) <i>rational</i> in the sense that it is reasonable, coherent, comprehensible, accurate, sincerely stated, and morally right and appropriate? Or is there evidence that what is said and thought is <i>irrational</i> in the sense that it is unreasonable, contradictory, incoherent, incomprehensible, inaccurate, insincerely stated (or deceptive), or <i>not</i> morally right and appropriate? Do different people have different views about whether what is said and thought in this situation is rational rather than irrational?
<i>Doings</i>	<i>Material-economic arrangements</i>
In relation to our current practices (the ways we do things around here), are the things that are done, the resources used in doing them, and the infrastructure of facilities, equipment, set-ups productive and sustainable? Do different people have different views about whether our current practices are productive rather than unproductive? Do they have different views about whether our current practices are sustainable rather than unsustainable?	In relation to our current practices (the ways we do things around here), are the things that are done, the resources used in doing them, and the infrastructure of facilities, equipment, set-ups productive and sustainable? Do different people have different views about whether our current practices are productive rather than unproductive? Do they have different views about whether our current practices are sustainable rather than unsustainable?
<i>Relatings</i>	<i>Social-political arrangements</i>
In relation to our current practices (the ways we do things around here), are the ways people relate to each other, and the social arrangements of the situation just? Or are they unjust because they involve power relationships of domination or oppression (Young 1990)? Do they foster solidarity and a sense of inclusion and belonging among people? Or do they create exclusion or conflict among people? Do different people have different answers to these questions?	In relation to our current practices (the ways we do things around here), are the ways people relate to each other, and the social arrangements of the situation just? Or are they unjust because they involve power relationships of domination or oppression (Young 1990)? Do they foster solidarity and a sense of inclusion and belonging among people? Or do they create exclusion or conflict among people? Do different people have different answers to these questions?
<i>How can we now create a public sphere to investigate and change some of the differences identified above?</i>	<i>How can we now create a public sphere to investigate and change some of the differences identified above?</i>
Meeting one another in a <i>public sphere</i> , can we reach (1) <i>intersubjective agreement</i> about the language we use to understand our practices, (2) <i>mutual understanding</i> of one another's perspectives about the consequences of our practices, and (3) <i>unforced consensus</i> about what to do about our situation?	Meeting one another in a <i>public sphere</i> , can we reach (1) <i>intersubjective agreement</i> about the language we use to understand our practices, (2) <i>mutual understanding</i> of one another's perspectives about the consequences of our practices, and (3) <i>unforced consensus</i> about what to do about our situation?

you think about forming your action research group, and about the kinds of agreements you may need to reach with others as you begin.

In particular, thinking about how to proceed sensitively with others who may or may not want to participate in identifying a shared felt concern and investigating it together, you may want to note the first clause in the group protocols for critical participatory action researchers presented in *Resource 3*:

Group members agree to communicate respectfully and openly with one another throughout the project. In particular, this means that they agree, individually and collectively, sincerely to seek (a) intersubjective agreement about the ideas and language they use, (b) mutual understanding of one another's points of view, and (c) unforced consensus about what to do under the circumstances that exist when a decision about what to do is needed.

This is crucial to the formation of a public sphere designed for public discourse about issues of shared concern. As you work through Table 7.2, the group should check at various points in the conversation (and someone should act as facilitator to ensure that this checking happens regularly)

- a. whether there are yet agreements that people are understanding one another's ideas and language (and whether they feel confident that others views are comprehensible, true in the sense of accurate, sincerely stated and not deceptive, and morally right and appropriate)—that is, whether there is yet *intersubjective agreement* about the language we are using,
- b. whether you have yet heard from a sufficient number of people representing different perspectives (remembering that people in similar roles also have different views and perspectives on issues), and whether differences of perspective are being *recognised* and *respected*—that is, whether there is yet *mutual understanding* of each other's points of view,
- c. whether people have identified actions that could be taken among which there could be voluntary agreement in a group (or sub-group) about what to do, both as a step in the *action* for the group or sub-group to take, and as a step in the *research* to be done to investigate our practices and their consequences—that is, whether there is yet *an unforced consensus* about what to do.

Forming a critical participatory action research group requires openness to negotiation about the felt concerns that will be at the heart of the inquiry and the action for the group. In *Resources 2, 3 and 4*, we will present ideas about the ethics and politics of working in groups and institutions, and *Principles of Procedure* for action research, but here we are focusing on the very early days of groups—the moment at which it is possible to form—or not to form—a critical participatory action research initiative around a shared felt concern and a group wanting to act on it and investigate it. This is the moment of working though, in practice, the paradox mentioned at the beginning of this section: the dilemma of deciding *what* to research when it is not yet clear *who* will be doing the research, and of deciding *who* will be doing the research when it is not yet clear *what to research*.

Our experience suggests that, in fact, groups form in different ways. Sometimes, the formation of a group is the idea of an individual or a small group; once a larger group meets and begins to discuss what might be done, the ideas and interests of the

initiators merge with other ideas and other interests, and begin to be reshaped by concerns shared more widely within the group. There are occasions when an initiator might withdraw because his or her interests are not those of the group, but these are unusual. More often, there is a process of give and take, and the group arrives at a shared view about what might be done. Equally, sometimes, larger groups split into several groups each with its own project of investigation and action. This was the case with the larger group at Braxton High School from which for the recycling project (Example 1) emerged. This can be a good strategy for investigating and taking action on a number felt concerns simultaneously, giving a strengthened sense of solidarity across or between as well as within groups.

When a larger public sphere gives rise to several smaller ones, in the form of different groups pursuing different agendas, two issues deserve attention. First, thought might be given to whether the smaller action groups are as inclusive as the parent group, representing a range of perspectives and positions. If the range has diminished, it may be advisable to think of ways to have those perspectives and positions represented in the smaller groups. Second, thought might be given to ways to maintain the larger public sphere and to keep the smaller groups in touch with one another's progress. In some critical participatory action research initiatives that have given rise to a number of smaller group projects, some participants have produced a newsletter that reports progress in the smaller groups to the audience of the larger group (and sometimes other audiences beyond—but this must be carefully negotiated). Sometimes, too, initiatives like these hold meetings or conferences of the larger group at which the smaller groups give reports on their progress, and exchange ideas about problems and issues that they have encountered (and how they have dealt with them).

Although public spheres, in principle, could be large enough to involve everyone involved in or affected by the practices that go on in a particular setting, in practice this may not be the case. In small schools we have worked with, sometimes all staff will be involved in a project, and students may be affected by what happens without being involved in decision making about the action or the research. In large schools, forming a public sphere of all staff, let alone students and staff, may be impracticable. In most cases of critical participatory action research initiatives in schools, not all parents and caregivers or interested community members can be involved. In practice, some of the people involved in or affected by the practices in a setting are left outside the public sphere. When this is the case, people within the public sphere may need to take special steps to learn the views of others involved in or affected by the practices in the setting. Thus, a group composed entirely of teachers might seek the views of students; a group composed of students and teachers might seek the views of family or community members; a group composed of people from a particular school might seek the views of people on the staff of their district office; and so on.

It is very important to be aware of this boundary. It is a boundary that divides those who have the opportunity to learn directly from participating in the action and the research from those who do not. It also divides those whose knowledge and skills and values will be resources for the conversations of the public sphere, and

to the action and the research, from others whose knowledge, skills and values will not be resources for the public sphere. Moreover, what is learned within the public sphere may, over time, become a source of solidarity and strength for those within it, but divide those within from others outside. We have seen this in educational action research projects where a group of teachers develops confidence and capability with a new approach to literacy, for example, but leaves the teaching of others in a school unchanged, so students have to cope with the consequences of encountering different literacy strategies as they move from one class to another or one grade to another.

This problem of creating ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ is why public spheres are meant to have permeable boundaries, and be open to newcomers. This is also why people working within public spheres like those formed in critical participatory action research should be willing to talk about their work with, and report to, people and groups outside the public sphere of the action research group—so that they can test the legitimacy and justifiability of their changing ideas and changing practices and changing conditions against others’ views and perspectives and practices. And here is another role for newsletters—to inform people outside a public sphere about what is happening within it, or for people in one public sphere to report to people in another, related public sphere.

Clearly, the process of forming a critical participatory action research group—a public sphere—around a shared felt concern is a process of negotiation. It may tap into existing shared interests, or create a shared interest. It is always a crucial step in the development of a shared sense of control over the action research process. Participants should all feel that they have an important part to play in the inquiry process, and that their contributions are important and valued. This is a crucial part of developing a collective of interested people who can collaborate in the research and the action. It is not just that others will be consulted, nor that they agree to cooperate—they should know that they are embarking on a collaborative enterprise. Clearly, in critical participatory action research, the initiator should reject any form of group operation in which others are coerced or seduced into participating as tools of the initiator—as objects of enquiry rather than as knowing, active and contributing subjects and full co-participants in the enquiry. This is a process that requires give and take, but is often easily accomplished as people see that participants understand their concerns, see them as legitimate, and begin to reformulate their ideas as an inevitable outcome of learning together. Documenting these ideas as they unfold is a good way of recording individual transformation as well as strengthening the collective educational identity of the group.

## **Resource 2: Some Notes on Research Ethics for Critical Participatory Action Researchers**

Based on the view of critical participatory action research formulated by Carr and Kemmis (1986) and Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, 2005), Locke et al. (2013) developed ethical guidelines for participating in critical participatory action research.

In particular, they underlined the need to blur dichotomised understandings of the roles of teachers and researchers, teachers and administrators, and learners and leaders. Because their understanding of critical participatory research parallels the view presented in this book, we refer to their ethical principles, where applicable, in this resource.

### ***General Principles of Research Ethics: Respecting Persons, Avoiding Harm, Justice and Beneficence***

Collecting evidence in critical participatory action research raises many ethical issues. The main ethical obligations of those doing research (or practising a profession) are to respect the persons involved and affected, and to *do no harm*. Respecting the persons involved and affected by the research means respecting their integrity and humanity as persons—as people whose rights and whose physical and psychological and cultural integrity must be protected, and not damaged, in the research process. Locke et al. (2013) refer to this need to protect every participant’s interests as “*the affective principle*” (p. 114), and they emphasize, as we do here, that it is incumbent upon everyone taking part in critical participatory action research to validate each other as whole persons. Validating each other as whole persons requires, firstly, avoiding harm to participants. This means not only avoiding physical harm or hurt, but also psychological harm (for example, stress or anxiety) or other harm like depriving participants of esteem, or taking them away from educational activities they would have been occupied in had the research not intervened, or in any way damaging their reputations. A researcher also needs to consider, if there is risk of harm (for example, by asking a question that causes a respondent distress because it recalls a traumatic event, like the death of a parent), how to repair any harm done (for example, by making available counselling for someone who is distressed).

The principle of *justice* in research requires avoiding injustice in the process of the research, for example, by processes that oppress or dominate participants (Young 1990). According to Young (1990), oppression occurs wherever practices or structures unreasonably constrain participants’ rights or opportunities for self-expression and self-development; domination occurs wherever practices or structures unreasonably constrain participants’ rights or opportunities for self-determination.

Locke et al. (2013) noted that critical participatory action research almost always involves outsiders (for example, university academics, consultants, outside organizations) and insiders (for example, school-based staff) coming together. They therefore argued that careful attention ought to be given to how to blur usual understandings of these dichotomized roles to avoid injustice in the research process. To blur these understandings, it is advisable to discuss at the outset of a critical participatory action research initiative what it means to collaborate in highly participatory ways, and how it is vital that each person feels comfortable to be honest and open, and to switch roles (to follow or to lead a conversation or activity) depending on the situation. Locke, Alcorn and O’Neill believe that this kind of openness and role fluidity

will alleviate tensions caused by some participants being overly deferential to others or some participants feeling the need to take control and lead conversations and activities all of the time. By flattening usual hierarchies between participants who occupy traditionally hierarchically organized roles, they believe that there will be fewer chances of oppression caused by power struggles. Locke, Alcorn and O'Neill consider this kind of transparency amongst participants as central to "*the principle of critical self-reflexivity*" (p. 113), which refers to being open about all assumptions being made about all aspects of the research design.

The principle of *beneficence* requires that research be undertaken in the interests of the people involved and affected, in the interests of the whole human community, and in the interests of the sustainability of the Earth. Locke et al. (2013) argue that a necessary consequence of taking the interests of all involved in a critical participatory action research initiative into consideration, is that each participant has a right to voice her or his perspectives on key decisions related to the research, on "*the principle of inclusivity*" (p. 113). Locke, Alcorn and O'Neill also noted that, regardless of the nature of participants' roles, whether highly participatory or more peripheral, such participants ought to be considered "full" participants of the action research on "*the principle of maximal participant recognition*" (p. 113).

An injustice can occur in research, including critical participatory action research, and the principle of beneficence can be compromised, whenever particular individuals or groups (like university students in psychology courses or prisoners or poor people paid to participate in medical research studies, say) bear more than their fair share of the burden of participating in research that claims to be justified because it is for the good of the human community as a whole. Sometimes, tensions may arise between participants who understand the importance of ensuring that ethical processes are followed (for example, some academics, or medical researchers, who are required to deal explicitly with ethical issues as part of the process of securing approval to undertake a research study) and those who may not be accustomed to thinking about ethical issues in research relationships (for example, some teachers, administrators, students and parents in educational research relationships, and patients in medical research relationships). Locke et al. (2013) discuss the need for these tensions to be worked through by having the co-participants talk transparently with one another about their respective agendas and possible implications of taking certain courses of action in the research. They call this "*the principle of negotiation and consensus*" (p. 113).

### ***Informed Consent and Assent***

*Informed consent* is consent given *freely* and *voluntarily*, without coercion or fear of any kind of penalties or repercussions if, for example, people do not participate in an action research initiative. It is 'informed' because participants must be given, usually in writing, a clear and comprehensible (ordinary language) description of the purpose and nature of the research, and clear information about any records to

be made and kept and used in the course of the research. The need to write in clear and plain language is reinforced by Locke et al. (2013) as “the principle of plain speaking” (p. 113). To genuinely be informed consent, moreover, participants must have an unlimited and unfettered right to withdraw their consent at any time, or not to participate, without any form of penalty. Locke, Alcorn and O’Neill call this “*the principle of communicative freedom*” (p. 113). Participants should also have right to withdraw permission for records about them (images, for example) to be retained or stored or used, even after the record has been made. (This kind of withdrawal of permission can create substantial problems, difficult to remedy, once records have been made.)

Some kinds participants are unable to give informed consent, and information or evidence about them can only be collected only with the informed consent of their caregivers. People who *may* not be able to give informed consent include minors (people under the age of majority—18 years in Australia), speakers of languages other than that normally used in the setting (because they may not understand what they are being asked to give consent to), and people with intellectual disabilities (who also may not understand).

It is important to note that children under the age of 18 vary in their capabilities of understanding a researcher’s intentions and, according to numerous academics (Carr and Lee 2012; Morrow 2013), ought to be provided with the opportunity to consent to certain kinds of participation in research. Groundwater-Smith (personal communication 2013) explains: “Informed consent requires the presentation of information that is accessible, a procedure to ensure that the information is understood by the signatory, and a recognisable response that affirms acceptance”. Even where children (or others) cannot give informed consent, however, Groundwater-Smith emphasises that ethical practice requires that they have a clear, free opportunity to give—or to deny—their *assent* to participating in any way in a research study, including a critical participatory action research initiative. Moreover, children may choose to offer a researcher their opinions in a whole survey or they may choose to complete only part of a survey. It is important to take the time to determine whether children themselves choose to participate in research by giving them an opportunity to give their assent and thus to choose whether or not to participate in research.

Some people should not be asked to give informed consent, or to participate in a research initiative, because participating in the research would cause them harm or embarrassment. Sometimes, but not always, this is because people are members of particular cultural groups. If people were conducting a critical participatory action research program about a school’s swimming education program, for example, it might be necessary to provide alternative educational activities for a group of young women whose cultural backgrounds and social norms of modesty precluded them from appearing in swimming costumes if males are present. There are many other reasons people might not want to participate in particular activities because they would be embarrassed, however, especially if they must do things in front of others—for example, because they are poor spellers, because they are not good at sports, because they are allergic to grass seeds, and so on.

Many ethical issues arise about gathering evidence and records of evidence that have a life of their own, once they are collected. Ethical questions arise concerning who can see the evidence and under what conditions, how records are stored and who will have access to them, and how records (like photographs) may or may not be used in publications—or used for other purposes even beyond the life of the critical participatory action research initiative people are presently involved in. Any researcher, including someone involved in critical participatory action research, needs to think these issues through *before* collecting any kind of evidence. These kinds of issues can arise even for information or evidence collected in a personal professional diary or journal; critical participatory action researchers need to think carefully about how they will use material they record there, who will have access to it, and what can be said about what is in the journal, for example. The issues are especially pointed in the case of photo and video images of people, and the digital records of all kinds (especially in an era of images captured, stored and distributed via mobile phones and social media like *Facebook*). In general, no evidence should be collected, and no audio or video records should be made, and no photographs should be taken, without the *informed consent* of all those to be recorded.

Researchers and participant-researchers should always explicitly seek the informed consent, and/or the assent, of those to be recorded (or their caregivers)

1. for a recording of any kind to be made (the consent should explicitly specify what kinds of recordings will be made),
2. about who is permitted to see the records once collected (especially visual images),
3. about how the records will be stored and under what conditions of access (for example, storage in locked cabinets, with access only by people in a research team for analysis and interpretation of evidence during the research process), and the period for which they may be kept before being destroyed), and
4. about the use and about the distribution of any records (and images) in any form of publication or presentation that may arise from the research—or in any other kind of publication at any time.

### ***Dependent Relationships***

A special problem of research ethics arises in the case of *dependent relationships*. Dependent relationships are relationships like the relationship of a child to a parent, a student to a teacher, or a patient to a doctor or a nurse. In such cases, it is difficult to be sure that the dependent person is really free voluntarily to consent to participate in a project where their parent or teacher or doctor or nurse is the researcher. The dependent person may fear that they will suffer some kind of penalty or some other kind of repercussion if they do not agree to participate—a penalty or repercussion that would register not in the research, but in the conduct of the relationship between the people involved outside the research. The issue of dependent relationships is often troublesome for Human Research Ethics Committees when they con-

sider applications for approval from action researchers who are, for example, teachers who will be collecting evidence in their own classrooms, including evidence from or about their students—because the students are in a dependent relationship with the teacher. When asked to give informed consent to participate in the research, the student (or the student’s caregiver) may feel unable to refuse or withhold consent from the teacher. In such cases, action researchers have sometimes asked independent people unknown to the students to interview or otherwise collect information from the students, with the identities of the students being hidden from the teacher—that is, the students’ responses are *de-identified*, so the teacher cannot tell which responses came from which students. By this means, some of the problems of the dependent relationship are reduced, but not removed, because the students (or patients in the case of a doctor, or clients in the case of a social worker) are not in a dependent relationship with the person who actually gathers the evidence. The problems of dependent relationships are not entirely removed by this means, however, because the students may still feel compelled to take part because the research is being done *for* their teacher.

The problem of dependent relationships is rather different when the students (or other people in dependent relationships) are also the researchers—or when the students are researchers alongside their teachers. The problem of dependent relationships may remain if the students are compelled, or feel compelled to participate in the research, but if the students are genuine partners in the conducting the research, determining what evidence should be collected and from whom, the problem of dependent relationships is removed—at least in relation to those students who are the researchers. If students are genuinely free to participate or not to participate in the research, as researchers, and they decide to participate, then their participation may be understood to be evidence of their informed consent and/or assent.

The strongest protections regarding dependent relationships include (a) having independent third parties discuss the giving or withholding of informed consent and/or assent (and the need for consent to really be free and voluntary) with people who are in dependent relationships with the people doing the research; (b) appointing advocates on behalf of people in dependent relationships who will observe the consent-giving and/or assent-giving and research processes to consider whether dependent people are being subjected to unwanted pressure to participate; and (c) appointing mediators or arbitrators who can receive complaints and address concerns if and when people in dependent relationships feel under pressure in the research relationship, and who can direct the researchers to refrain from actions that cause concern to those in dependent relationships.

### ***Confidentiality and Anonymity***

In much social research, researchers collect evidence that is then *de-identified*: either simply disconnected from the names of the people who gave the evidence (for example, their answers to interview questions) or coded, so that participants’ names

and identities can be hidden and protected. By techniques like this, researchers can often make good on the promise that the identities of those who participate will forever remain *confidential*. They are often also able to guarantee *anonymity*—because people will never be identifiable in any report of the research.

In critical participatory action research, however, the researchers and the people being researched are usually the same people—although not all of the participants in the setting may be part of the group doing the critical participatory action research.

Participants in the setting who are *not* participants in the critical participatory action research initiative may require the same protections as in other forms of social and educational research—guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity, for example. They may also need to give informed consent and/or assent if records about them are being made, stored, used for analysis and interpretation, or used in publications of any kind. Participants in the setting who are *not* involved in the research activities may *not* need to give informed consent if the initiative does not involve making, storing, or using records about them, or publishing information about them. Those participants also may *not* need to give informed consent if the activities they are involved in are an ordinary part of the everyday activities of the setting—teaching in a school, home care in a community nursing setting, helping people to develop their occupations in an occupational therapy setting, for instance. This might be the case if a critical participatory action research initiative is undertaken by a group of teachers (or community care nurses, or occupational therapists) exploring their own teaching, where students are not members of the research group but they are involved in learning in relation to the teachers' teaching. In such a case, we believe, it is not necessary to request informed consent from the students or their caregivers (or patients or clients or people authorised to act on their behalf). If there is doubt about the extent to which these groups will be involved—for example, evidence may be collected about their reactions or attitudes to a changed practice of teaching (or nursing or occupational therapy), it would be prudent to invite those people to give their informed consent to participate.

### ***Mutual Trust and Mutual Vulnerability***

The case is rather different for people who all participate in a critical participatory action research initiative both as the ones responsible for the action and as the ones responsible for the research. Among those participating in the critical participatory action research initiative, one may collect evidence on behalf of another, or a group of others, but the people involved remain identifiable to each other. Critical participatory action researchers cannot guarantee anonymity or confidentiality about participation in the research, especially during the research. If critical participatory action researchers want to make a report or presentation about their work, it may be possible, but difficult, to anonymise or protect the identities of participants, especially in the case of audiences who know the setting and the people in it. Critical participatory action researchers should therefore work according to protocols and

principles of procedure (like those presented in Chap. 7 as *Resource 3: Critical participatory action research group protocols: Ethical agreements for participation in public spheres* and *Resource 4: Principles of procedure for action researchers*—adapted for the local situation as needed), to ensure that people are treated with respect, and that harm is avoided.

That being said, however, critical participatory action researchers can and do usually choose to embark on a shared research initiative in the clear knowledge and understanding that their lives and work will be the subject of their shared scrutiny and perhaps scrutiny by others. They may choose to adopt protocols about reports that go beyond the group, but nevertheless proceed in a process of collective self-reflection that necessarily makes them more vulnerable to one another, and perhaps to others. They generally do so because they want to learn from each other, and, by working together, to transform themselves, their practices, their understandings, and their situation. They enter the communicative space of a public sphere not because it is *without* risks, but *despite* the risks. They are willing to enter the communicative space of the public sphere because they mutually agree to observe the three principal commitments of communicative action: to genuinely seek intersubjective agreement about the ideas and language they use; to genuinely seek to understand one another's perspective and points of view; and to genuinely seek unforced consensus about what to do. These commitments are the basis for their mutual trust and their mutual protection. Their protection nevertheless remains fragile—they remain vulnerable to one another, to the embarrassments of performing in public (even if within a public sphere), to changes of mind, to changes of heart, to the claims of friendships and alliances under circumstances of conflict, to the consequences of threats to self-interests, and other vulnerabilities. Critical participatory action research always proceeds on the basis that the benefits of mutual trust will outweigh the costs of mutual vulnerability.

Under many circumstances, it should be noted, doing critical participatory action research is an ordinary part of the life of a professional like a teacher or medical doctor or social worker or nurse who wants to reflect self-critically on her or his practice. Collecting evidence is part of doing the job. It is necessary to the self-reflective part of professional work. The critical participatory action research initiative and the professional practice are not two entirely separate activities. They are intertwined; they necessarily overlap. The obligations of the professional to act in accordance with professional ethics in their field extend to their involvement in a critical participatory action research initiative. Likewise, where professional practitioners reflect critically on their own practice, their obligations to act ethically in research extend into their involvement in their professional practice. This complementarity finds its foundation not only in the professions but also in everyday life: in the ethical principles of *respect for persons* (and groups) and of *avoiding harm*. These ethical principles should govern us not only as researchers or as professionals, but also as persons.

The special case of research that occurs as part of professional practice was recognised decades ago by the United States of America's National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research in its (1979).

*The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research* (National Institutes of Health, Education and Welfare, United States of America). An early section of the Belmont Report was explicitly concerned with “*Boundaries between research and practice*”. The Commissioners wrote:

It is important to distinguish between biomedical and behavioral research, on the one hand, and the practice of accepted therapy on the other, in order to know what activities ought to undergo review for the protection of human subjects of research. The distinction between research and practice is blurred partly because both often occur together (as in research designed to evaluate a therapy) and partly because notable departures from standard practice are often called “experimental” when the terms “experimental” and “research” are not carefully defined.

For the most part, the term “practice” refers to interventions that are designed solely to enhance the well-being of an individual patient or client and that have a reasonable expectation of success. The purpose of medical or behavioral practice is to provide diagnosis, preventive treatment or therapy to particular individuals. By contrast, the term “research” designates an activity designed to test an hypothesis, permit conclusions to be drawn, and thereby to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge (expressed, for example, in theories, principles, and statements of relationships). Research is usually described in a formal protocol that sets forth an objective and a set of procedures designed to reach that objective. When a clinician departs in a significant way from standard or accepted practice, the innovation does not, in and of itself, constitute research. The fact that a procedure is “experimental,” in the sense of new, untested or different, does not automatically place it in the category of research. Radically new procedures of this description should, however, be made the object of formal research at an early stage in order to determine whether they are safe and effective. Thus, it is the responsibility of medical practice committees, for example, to insist that a major innovation be incorporated into a formal research project.

Research and practice may be carried on together when research is designed to evaluate the safety and efficacy of a therapy. This need not cause any confusion regarding whether or not the activity requires review; the general rule is that if there is any element of research in an activity, that activity should undergo review for the protection of human subjects.

In education, the boundary between research (including critical participatory action research) and practice (in general, educational practice) is also blurred. Whenever a teacher tries something new in her or his teaching, it is part of her or his educational practice, and she or he is accountable (and legally responsible) for what is done in terms of the ethics (and legal requirements) of the profession. When such a teacher is engaged in critical participatory action research to improve her or his educational practice, she or he continues to be bound by those professional ethics and those legal requirements. The teacher should be held accountable for any breach of those ethics and requirements. Indeed, continuing to employ practices that are inimical to the interests of students—for example, forms of classroom management or discipline that are harmful or unjust—would be unethical. Thus, teachers (and other professionals) continuously evaluate and investigate their practice in order to find better ways to teach, and to engage their students as learners, as well as to avoid or ameliorate practices and the consequences of practices that are irrational or unreasonable, unproductive or unsustainable, or unjust or excluding. When they do so, they are not always engaged in research (as the authors of the Belmont Report recognise), but (as they also recognise) if the departure from usual practice is significant, then it should be researched or evaluated to determine whether the new practice is justified. This is the usual kind of case where action research, including critical participatory action research, is initiated by teachers: to discover the consequences of new

ways of doing things. And it is here that the boundary between research and practice becomes blurred. Of course, the teacher's ethical and legal obligations are not lifted, and she or he must continue to act in accordance with them, but she or he must also consider the extent to which *additional* ethical obligations are relevant to do with conducting the research. This Resource has indicated some of the ways in which a teacher must observe additional ethical obligations related to *research*.

Consider the case of using students' assignments, or student work samples, to discover whether a new approach to teaching a topic yields better learning outcomes for learners. Teachers collect work samples and assignments all the time, and must handle them in accordance with their professional obligations. These professional ethical obligations also govern how they may or may not use students' work samples, for example, *not* making them public without consent. Thus, collecting and analysing work samples in a critical participatory action research initiative will ordinarily be ethically acceptable, so long as the research causes no additional threat of harm to a student whose work sample is collected. Some parts of the research process could raise additional ethical concerns, however: for example, if the teacher wants to publish the results of their research in a professional journal, and proposes to use a student's work as an illustration in that publication. In such a case, the student could be vulnerable to harm (for example, embarrassment) because of the publication (that would not occur as part of the teacher's usual professional practice). Where an additional threat to the integrity and wellbeing of a student is created *by the research process*, the teacher-researcher should ensure that the kinds of ethical concerns discussed here have been addressed and properly resolved *in advance of the commencement of the collection of evidence*.

### ***Additional Reading***

For an extended treatment of *ethical issues in action research*, see

Campbell, A., & Groundwater-Smith, S. (eds.) (2007) *An Ethical Approach to Practitioner Research: Dealing with issues and dilemmas in action research*. New York: Routledge.

Examples of *national statements on ethics for research* involving humans include: National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council, and Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee (2013) *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, 2007 (Updated May 2013)*. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra. Available at: [http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/\\_files\\_nhmrc/publications/attachments/e72\\_national\\_statement\\_130624.pdf](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/e72_national_statement_130624.pdf)

Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (2010) *Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, December 2010*. Available at: [http://www.ethics.gc.ca/pdf/eng/tpcs2/TCPS\\_2\\_FINAL\\_Web.pdf](http://www.ethics.gc.ca/pdf/eng/tpcs2/TCPS_2_FINAL_Web.pdf)

National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research (1979) *The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guide-*

*lines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research*. National Institutes of Health, Education and Welfare, United States of America. Available at: [www.hhs.gov/ohrp/policy/Belmont.html](http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/policy/Belmont.html)

### **Resource 3: Critical Participatory Action Research Group Protocols: Ethical Agreements for Participation in Public Spheres<sup>2</sup>**

Participants in the \_\_\_\_\_ critical participatory action research initiative agree to participate in accordance with the following protocols:

#### **1. Respect and open communication.**

1. Group members agree to communicate respectfully and openly with one another throughout the project. In particular, this means that they agree, individually and collectively, sincerely to seek (a) intersubjective agreement about the ideas and language they use, (b) mutual understanding of one another's points of view, and (c) unforced consensus about what to do under the circumstances that exist when a decision about what to do is needed.
2. Each group member agrees to respect the rights of others to withdraw from the study at any time, or to decline participation in particular aspects of the study, or to have information they have provided removed from any reports emanating from the study. Group members agree to respect the right of any group member to withdraw from the group, the study, or part of the study.
3. Group members agree to be open with other group members if they think the research is having a negative impact on the group, or on them personally.

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<sup>2</sup> These protocols were developed for a critical participatory action research initiative of which Stephen Kemmis is a member. The initiative is a small project, the Teacher Talk project (Chap. 6, Example 4), which, at the time of writing, is being conducted by seven academics at Charles Sturt University. In the project, participants critically explore problems and issues in their academic lives and work, and, in particular, how the changing conditions of work in the University (like the spread of new technologies, new forms of public administration, and new kinds of accountabilities) enable and constrain their academic practices (including teaching, research, academic administration, and engagement with disciplinary, professional and other communities). The form in which the protocols are presented here is based on the work of Kathleen Clayton (in preparation) whose PhD thesis research explores critical pedagogical praxis as understood and enacted by members of the Teacher Talk group. The group itself participated in the development of the protocols and signed a document in which they individually and collectively agreed to abide by them. Members of the group, at the time of writing, include: Ros Brennan Kemmis, Laurette Bristol, Kathleen Clayton, Christine Edwards-Groves, Stephen Kemmis, Annemaree Lloyd and Jane Wilkinson. Stephen Kemmis (2012) and Ian Hardy, a former member of the group now at the University of Queensland, have written (2010a, 2010b) about some of its findings.

## 2. Access to empirical material.

1. All group members will have access to empirical material/transcripts that are generated or collected within the context of the group meetings (that is, as ‘common empirical material’).
2. Access to material that is collected outside of group meetings, but that directly involves group members, for instance in observations or face to face interviews, will be restricted to those collecting the information and those about whom it is collected, unless the group members concerned negotiate for such material to be released to the group for the purposes of analysis or discussion (for example, at a group meeting) or in reports or publications. Group members agree that where others are involved (such as participating students who may appear in video-recorded lessons), such release of empirical material to the group will occur only with the consent of those involved.
3. Group members agree that if they wish (for their own publications and/or research purposes) to use common empirical material generated within this project, they need to negotiate that use of the empirical material with other members of the group<sup>3</sup>.

## 3. Identifiability in reports and publications.

1. Group members understand that participants may be identifiable in any representations of the critical participatory action research initiative where this involvement is acknowledged. Group members agree that this needs to be considered in all phases of the initiative and agree to act with discretion so that the institution and the participants can be appropriately safeguarded.
2. Considering the conditions outlined in 3.1, group members agree that:
  - a. it is appropriate to acknowledge the group members by name (e.g., in footnotes or in ‘Acknowledgement’ sections of reports of published accounts of the research); but that
  - b. non-gender specific pseudonyms (e.g., for direct quotes) are to be used in the main text of accounts so that it is difficult for readers to attribute particular comments to particular people; and
  - c. if, through the course of the study, the group members collectively decide that the naming of the group members in accounts of the research (beyond general acknowledgements) would be beneficial to both the individuals concerned and the institution, and not harmful to others, then individual written consent to be named would be obtained from each of the group members before anyone is named.

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<sup>3</sup> In keeping with this clause, members of the group gave permission for these group protocols to be included in this book.

#### 4. Reflecting on the research process.

1. In order to ensure that the research process does not compromise the integrity of the group, or impact negatively on those involved, group members agree to periodically review (as a group) how the research is unfolding and impacting on the group and the individual group members.

#### 5. Changes to group membership.

1. Group members agree that, if new members join the group during the project, the new members will be invited to take part in the research and written informed consent will be obtained before they become involved. Group members agree that the new group members will be required to agree to these group protocols.
2. Group members agree that if one or more of the group members no longer wish to be involved in the study, then other group members respect that group member's right to determine what of his or her previous statements can be used in the research.

#### 6. Representation.

1. If not directly involved in the writing of reports about the initiative, group members will be given an opportunity to check that their work and comments are fairly, relevantly and accurately (Kemmis and Robottom 1981) represented in any reports of the research.
2. Group members agree that, if they feel that representations relating to them are not fair, relevant or accurate, they will negotiate with the authors of the report, and with other members of the group, to resolve the issue, keeping in mind the principle of respect and open communication above (1.1).
3. The authors of any reports about the work of the group will notify the group about the writing and the existence of the reports, and will give group members access to the report and, so far as is practicable, will make copies available to group members on request.

#### 7. Mediation

In the very unlikely event that there is conflict/relationship breakdown (between group members) that cannot be resolved and that is detrimental to the project and/or well-being of group members, group members agree that \_\_\_\_\_ [a credible and neutral person] will be asked to act as mediator to help those concerned work through the issues.

#### 8. Certification of agreement

We, the undersigned, collectively, individually, and voluntarily give consent to our participation in the critical participatory action research initiative \_\_\_\_\_. In providing our group consent, we agree that:

1. We have each read an outline of the proposed initiative, discussed it, and understand the purpose, methods, potential risks and benefits of the research.



## Resource 4: Principles of Procedure for Action Researchers

As indicated in *Resource 2*, critical participatory action researchers must pay attention to the ethical principles guiding their work. Their actions are deeply embedded in an existing social organisation, formal or informal, and the failure to work within the general procedures of that organisation may not only jeopardise the process of improvement but existing valuable work. Principles of procedure for action research accordingly go beyond the usual concerns for confidentiality and respect for the persons who are the subjects of enquiry and define in addition, appropriate ways of working with other participants in the social organisation. The principles outlined below are consonant with the ideas we have already described for people's conduct in public spheres, and reflect more directly the commitment implicit in the methods of critical participatory action research to work closely with a particular group—participation and collaborative work, and negotiation within, and ultimately beyond, existing social and political circumstances.

### *Establish Working Rules for the Collaborating Group:*

- Keep minutes of your meetings (in addition to your own record keeping)
- Foster collaborative decision making and agreements that will be regarded as mutually binding on all participants
- Foster open and equal participation in discussion, and protect the interests of the least powerful
- Foster *communicative action*, that is, shared commitment to *intersubjective agreement* about the ideas and language being used, *mutual understanding* of one another's perspectives, and *unforced consensus* about what to do.
- Ensure that each person in the group takes a 'fair share' of the work to be done—and make it explicit, when this is not possible, that different people have different levels of capacity to participate (for example, some administrators may have limited time, or students may have educational commitments that preclude greater participation).

### *Observe Protocol*

Ensure that the relevant persons, committees and authorities have been consulted and informed, and that any necessary permissions and approvals have been obtained.

### ***Involve Participants***

Encourage others who have a stake in the changes you envisage to help you reshape your educational practice as you make it more rational, sustainable and just.

### ***Negotiate with Those Affected***

Not everyone will want to be directly involved: your work should take account of the responsibilities and wishes of others.

### ***Report Progress***

Keep the work visible and remain open to suggestions so that unforeseen and unseen ramifications can be taken account of; colleagues must have the opportunity to air their concerns.

### ***Obtain Explicit Authorisation before You Observe***

1. before you observe the activities of professional colleagues or others for the purposes of recording (the observation of your own students falls outside this imperative provided that your aim is the improvement of your teaching and their learning);
2. before you examine any files, correspondence or other documentation (and take copies only if specific authority to do this is obtained: and
3. before using quotations from verbatim transcripts, attributed observations, excerpts of audio and video recordings, judgements, conclusions or recommendations in reports.

### ***Negotiate Descriptions of People's Work and Accounts of Others' Points of View***

Allow those involved in accounts of their work, or in communications, interviews, meetings and written exchanges to require amendments that enhance the fairness, relevance and accuracy of the way they are represented in the accounts.

### ***Negotiate Reports for Various Levels of Release***

Remember that different kinds of reports are appropriate for different audiences; what is appropriate for an informal verbal report to a faculty meeting may not be appropriate for a written report to external agencies or in written reports to some audiences, especially outside the local situation. Be conservative if you cannot control distribution.

### ***Accept Responsibility for Maintaining Confidentiality***

Make it clear that any others with access to evidence or copies of reports also have responsibilities for maintaining confidentiality.

### ***Retain the Right to Report Your Work***

Provided that those involved in and affected by reports of your work are satisfied with the fairness, accuracy and relevance of accounts which pertain to them, and that the accounts do not cause harm (including embarrassment or harm to reputations) to those involved, then accounts should not be subject to veto or be sheltered by prohibitions of confidentiality. To the extent that this is practicable, invite others involved in or affected by your critical participatory action research initiative explicitly to acknowledge your right to report on your work (for example, by agreeing to these principles of procedure).

### ***Make Your Principles of Procedure Binding and Known***

All of the people involved in your critical participatory action research initiative must agree to these principles before the work begins; others affected by the initiative should be made aware of their rights in the process.

Remember that discussing these ‘principles of procedure’ with others in the setting are an opportunity to develop interest in the felt concern that you and your co-participants are working on. It is a good idea to provide a short information statement describing the project when you present these principles of procedure for their assent. The information statement should be agreed among co-participants. The process of reaching agreement among co-participants on the information statement may be helpful for co-participants, helping them to clarify for themselves an ‘ordinary language’ summary of what is intended. Preparing an information statement should thus be regarded as educational for participants as well as for those who need or want to know what is intended. Creating a ‘public meaning’ of the initiative is not

just a matter of providing information—it also helps to shape the way the initiative will be understood, and the terms in which it can be justified.

## Resource 5: Keeping a Journal

You can sustain awareness of your progress if you keep a record of your thinking, and especially how it changes over time. You will already have some experience of the evolution of your thinking as you began to think through your felt concern. As time passes, many issues, events, ideas, actions, and interactions will become salient and perhaps important, or lapse into insignificance as you learn more and situations change. A sound way of keeping a record of what is happening is to keep a diary or journal.

Any notebook or exercise book will do for the purpose: many people find that a large diary is ideal. You may prefer to carry it with you like a notebook; some people prefer to keep a journal at home and to write it up at the end of the day. You need to establish a routine of reflective writing—and make sure you keep to it! Do not let your journal-keeping lapse when you get busy.

Keeping a journal imposes a discipline of stopping to think each day about what you have been doing on your project, forcing you to reflect and compose your thoughts for your own record. It also allows you to review what you have done, your progress in changing your work in relation to your felt concern, and what you have been preoccupied by in earlier phases of your project. And it provides a record from which you can quote when you come to give others an account of your work (you may even wish to share your journal with trusted colleagues).

Using a journal helps you to steer the process of your own learning. It helps direct your evidence-gathering, and your learning, if you give your journal some structure, perhaps using categories like those in the practice architectures analysis tables provided in Chap. 4 (Table 4.5) and 5 (Tables 5.1 and 5.2), and in *Resource 1* (Table 7.1) of this *Planner*.

Your journal should contain at least five kinds of reflections, all related to your felt concern, and at the beginning especially, relating to recognising and unfreezing of old habits, customs and traditions and arrangements that were getting in the way of what seemed potentially good educational ideas. Remember that your felt concern arises because of a sense of dissatisfaction, sense of lack of legitimacy with the ‘project’ of the educational practice in which you are a participant. It is this project you are changing and researching through your critical participatory action research initiative. It is the arrangements and sayings, doings and relatings of your *educational practice* that constitute our focus here:

1. *Sayings and cultural-discursive arrangements*: notes and reflections on changing uses of *language* and the development of more coherent discourse about the felt concern you are studying—both your own and others’ language and discourse,

- and the ways they relate to the wider context of language and discourse of your workplace and the world around it (including relevant educational literature);
2. *Doings and material-economic arrangements*: notes and reflections about changing *activities* in your setting, and the emergence of more coherently described and justified educational *practices*—both your own and others’ activities, and in relation to the wider context of circumstances, constraints and opportunities in and beyond your workplace;
  3. *Relatings and social-political arrangements*: notes and reflections about changing *social relationships* among those involved in the setting, and any emerging changes to the formal *organisational structure*—both in relation to yourself and to others, and as they are framed within the wider structure of social relationships of your workplace and beyond;
  4. *Reflections on the project of your practice* (see Chap. 3): notes and reflections about how you and your co-participants see the *project* or purpose of your practice changing, and how your commitments (for example, your educational commitments) are changing in the light of what you and your co-participants are learning; and
  5. *Reflections on your practice of critical participatory action research*: notes and reflections about how your (and your co-participants’) practice of critical participatory action research is changing—for example, in (a) your use of the language of critical participatory action research, (b) the research activities you are engaged in, and (c) the social relationships you have with others in the public sphere of the critical participatory action research initiative (as well as others outside this public sphere—for example, does the collaborative practice of critical participatory action research contrast with non-collaborative, hierarchical, bureaucratic, coercive or competitive relationships in your workplace?).

How you organise your information gathering is affected by the nature of your project, and also by requirements for a report on your work, if reports are needed. Sometimes reports are required by bodies providing funding for a project; sometimes reports (in the form of assignments or theses) are required when people do courses that require students to undertake an action research project.

## Resource 6: Gathering Evidence, Documenting

We introduced Chap. 4: A new view of research with some comments about gathering evidence (as opposed to ‘collecting data’), and about the primary purpose of gathering evidence in critical participatory action research: to feed and nurture self-reflection, especially collective self-reflection in public spheres. Remember this when you and your co-participants are considering what kinds of evidence to collect. To decide, you need to ask what kind of light this evidence will throw on the question or issue or felt concern you are exploring, and on how it might help you—individually and collectively—to change your practice, your understanding

of your practice, and the conditions under which your practice is carried out. You should also ask how much evidence you need—especially at first, when your concern might shift or change as you begin to explore what is happening in your practice and your situation.

Remember, too, that in critical participatory action research, *participants must make their own records as they go*, for example, in diaries or journals. We are inclined to think that *keeping these kinds of records is the entry-ticket to the research group*.

More than this, we think that participants should be building *portfolios of different kinds of evidence* so they can triangulate evidence of different kinds and from different sources, and so they can interrogate and exchange evidence with other participants in the research group.

We also think that every participant in a critical participatory research initiative is a window into what happens in the setting participants share: a window into that world—their world. Each is a *living* source of evidence and perspectives—not a static record of evidence. Each brings perspectives into the conversation that constitutes a shared public sphere, and develops and extends her or his perspective by participating in the conversation that takes place there. In the light of these conversations, participants will change how they think and what they do and how they relate to each other, others involved and affected, and the world. And, in the light of these conversations, each may be able to collect new kinds of evidence about practices, understandings and the conditions for practice in the setting.

There is a rolling, dialectical relationship between the new kinds of questions that arise as we analyse and interpret the answers—the evidence—that we have already collected. The historian R. G. Collingwood (1939, 1946) called this rolling relationship “the question and answer method”: asking intelligent questions that you think you may have the evidence to answer, then seeing where the evidence takes you *in fact*, then asking further questions.

The nine kinds of evidence suggested below are not the only ways you can collect evidence, but they are frequently used in critical participatory action research in education. As we argued in Chap. 3: A New View of Practice, the setting in which you practise abounds with evidence: words are used there, things are done there, people relate to each other and the world there: all of this may yield evidence about people’s practices, their understandings of their practices, and the conditions in which they practice: *your* practices, *your* understandings, and the conditions under which *you* work.

### 1. *Diaries, journals, logs, and blogs*

*Diaries* are personal accounts (usually but not necessarily private) recording observations, ideas, interpretations, feelings, reactions, hunches, speculations, explanations, and reflections on a regular basis around topics of interest or concern. Keeping a diary is a discipline that encourages continuing documentation of your views of what is happening in a continuous present. Sometimes, people keep collections of notes rather than diaries, but with the same general intention as for diaries. Different people associated with a critical participatory action research initiative might



Fig. 7.1 My story writing blog

all be encouraged to keep diaries about things relevant to the initiative—they become a rich source for exploring different participants’ different perspectives on what happens.

*Journals* are often bigger than diaries, and are sometimes organised more systematically around themes or topics for clustering related observations or information. Some researchers prefer to write double-entry journals, which is almost a hybrid of field notes and a journal, in which they record their observations on the left-hand pages of their journal, and their interpretations or comments or questions on the right-hand page. Regardless of how you choose to record your journey, it is critical to have a location of your observations, interpretations and questions.



Fig. 7.2 Statistics for ‘My story writing blog’

*Logs* are similar to diaries or journals but usually focus on (logging) the times, and perhaps the durations, of events. They can be organised both by time (what’s happening at time X?) and by the types of events being recorded (the number of times a teacher speaks to a particular student, for example). Their usefulness is enhanced if diary- or journal-like commentary on the events is included.

*Blogs*: Weblogs/blogs are “frequently updated, reverse-chronological entries on a single Web page” (Blood 2004, p. 53). In 1999, *Blogger* (www.blogger.com) offered the first free software that enabled users to create blogs through “push-button publishing” (Blood 2004, p. 54). Prior to 1999, blogs were concise lists of hyperlinks to topically-related Web pages. Today blogs are known for their “tremendous diversity” in content and formats (Nardi et al. 2004, p. 42). When Rhonda Nixon, in her role as district consultant, worked with teachers to share with them the benefits of creating a blog for students and staff to record their journey, she used her own story writing blog space to show how the most recent post appears first and that post can range from print, visuals, audio or a vlog (video log):

Rhonda also shared how it was possible to use the blog “dashboard” to track who is visiting the space and what kinds of posts seemed to attract greater participation:

In all three school examples of critical participatory action research presented in Chap. 6, the staff and students created blogs and judged the kinds of posts that attracted attention either formally using the dashboard feature (if it was available) or informally by the number of individuals contributing to the collective blog. During Grace Elementary School’s self-directed learning project and Joseph Junior High School’s graphic novel project, students recorded their journal on a protected blog site that allowed them to post print, audio and videotexts. For Grace Elementary, the blog was a feature of their district’s portal or web space, and the students typically posted print text because the wait time to upload audio and videotexts was a detractor. Joseph Junior High School used *Edmodo* because it allowed students to upload audio and video files as well as to print texts quite quickly and easily. It also provided students with the option of having outsiders see what they were doing

and the teachers provided limited access to some selected outsiders to comment on students' work. It was also easy to upload the short video clips of students' conversations about particular 'graphica' (highly visual texts).

2. *Written records: field notes, anecdotal or running records, event sampling*

There is a great variety of kinds of written records in addition to diaries and journals and the other kinds of records listed above.

*Field notes* are notes of observations made in the field—usually notes made about events as they happen. While diaries and journals usually record things *the author* does and thinks (including observations about others and other things made to encourage one's own reflection), field notes are usually observations about *other people or things*. Sometimes, field notes are made to be given to others—perhaps to the people who were observed, or perhaps to be shared with other members of a research group who are also collecting evidence about the same question or issue or concern. Field notes are usually rather open: what is observed is not classified into previously determined categories (as might happen with a log, or an observation check-list). What is noted in field notes is also usually related to some (often shared) question or issue or concern that focuses observation—though occasionally observers are left to note their impressions without explicit guidance about a focus question or issue.

*Anecdotal records or running records* are usually written, descriptive, longitudinal accounts of what an individual (for example, a particular child) says or does in particular situations over a period of time. Accurate description is emphasised, with the aim of accumulating a broad picture of behaviour over time, allowing people to arrive at a well-founded interpretation or (sometimes) explanation of behaviour. Anecdotal records usually include descriptions of the context and events preceding and following the incident(s) being observed—things that might be relevant to the issue under investigation. The method may be applied to groups as well as to individuals.

*Event sampling* is a way to gather evidence about a number of different topics systematically over time. At the end of a day, for example, a participant could make a note about one or two topics chosen randomly from, say, eight different topics. The eight topics could be on cards, which are shuffled before the participant picks one from the pack. A random number generator on a mobile phone or computer could also be used. Topics could include observations about a particular student in class today, the quality of my lesson introductions today, how I dealt with behaviour problems in the classroom today, an issue of gender that came up today, about how my actions did or did not contribute to Greenhouse Gas emissions reduction today, and so on. It would equally be possible to sample three students (say) at random from a class list, to make observations about how I interacted with them today, or comments about how I interacted with other staff members (from a list of staff members) today. The event sampling approach could also be used for theoretically-driven observations like observations about students' sayings and how they were supported by cultural-discursive arrangements, students' doings and how they were supported by material-economic arrangements, and students' relatings and how they

were supported by social-political arrangements. Event sampling makes it possible to gradually build a picture about each topic, while keeping interest fresh across a range of topics. Over ten weeks, one might expect to make about ten observations about five topics making one observation each work day, or twenty observations making two observations each work day, or thirty observations making three observations each work day. Event sampling approaches has the advantage of focus, maintaining interest and easing the difficulty of monitoring many things at once.

### 3. Interviews

Interviews are an important way to collect different people's perspectives on issues and events. People often think of interviewers in the form of an external researcher coming in to a situation—a school, for example—to find out the views of people inside the organisation or setting. In such cases, an external researcher comes to the organisation to discover the prevalence of certain kinds of views, or be more informed about participants' understandings of their situation. Sometimes critical participatory action researchers ask 'critical friends' to do these kinds of interviews, to help inform the researcher-participant group about the range and diversity of views within the group. There are advantages, however, in having members of the researcher-participant group interview one another—teachers interviewing other teachers, or students interviewing other students, or students interviewing teachers, for example. In cases like the students interviewing teachers, where the participants are known to one another but usually encounter each other in their different roles (as students or as teachers, for example), these kinds of interviews, done sensitively, can disrupt taken for granted role relationships and open communicative space across the boundaries that ordinarily separate people in different roles (and help to tease out the perspectives that go with their roles).

Three kinds of interviews (there are many more) are:

- *Informal conversations* between an interviewer (or facilitator) and the person or people being interviewed, around (aspects of) a question or issue or concern;
- *Planned but unstructured (also called semi-structured)*: with a few planned opening questions from interviewer to set the stage and put the person being interviewed at ease, but thereafter allowing the respondent to select what to talk about, often from a list of topics signalled in advance (perhaps even before the interview). In these kinds of interviews, the interviewer usually asks follow-up questions to probe or clarify information provided or points of view expressed.
- *Structured*: the interviewer has worked out a series of questions in advance, and controls the conversation along these lines. These kinds of interviews (which in some ways resemble questionnaires) usually involve collecting particular types of information or particular kinds of responses to questions or topics or issues well known in advance. A problem with this kind of interview (which is often less interesting for the interviewee) is that it frequently locks the interviewee in to the ideas and interpretive categories of the interviewer (or the one who designed the questions).

A very useful specialised kind of interview is the *interview to the double* (Nicolini 2009), in which a participant is asked to describe what they would say to someone who had to take over their job for a day, or to take their place in the classroom setting for an hour, or to otherwise do their job or fulfil the expectations of their own role. This encourages the interviewee to make explicit things that are necessary to their work or way of doing things, things that are important to them and to others, things that need to be handled with special care, problems and issues that a double would need to watch out for, or avoid, and things that might otherwise pass unnoticed or be taken for granted.

In any interview, *leading* (or *loaded*) *questions* should be avoided—questions phrased in ways that suggest a desired answer like “Did you protest about the school’s ban on students wearing jeans to school, or did you remain silent?”—which suggests that the correct response was to have protested, and names only two of many alternative positions an interviewee could have taken on the matter.

Many interviews are with a single interviewee; where people can speak more or less freely, *group interviews* (including *focus groups*) may also be helpful, especially where the interviewer encourages participants to express different views than ones already aired in discussion (to explore differences of perspective).

It is often helpful to give records of interviews (sometimes transcripts, or summaries, or notes) to the people interviewed. Sometimes, interviewees may want to amend an earlier position, or the way a view has been summarised; in almost all circumstances, making suggested amendments or elaborations improves the quality of accounts of the views of individuals or groups. If people are being quoted directly in a report or presentation arising from the research (even if anonymously, and especially if they are named or identifiable), it is good practice to allow them an opportunity to certify or agree that the accounts given of their points of view are fair, relevant and accurate (though interviewees can only be asked to certify the fairness, relevance and accuracy of accounts of their own views and the way their views are represented, and not about others’ views or the way others’ views are represented).

#### 4. *Audio and video recording, and photographs*

*Audio recording* lessons, meetings, and discussions of various kinds can produce large amounts of useful information that can be subjected to close analysis. This method is particularly useful for one-to-one and small group contacts within classes (small portable audio recorders can be used) or for analysis of teacher talk (for example, to explore teachers’ practices of questioning). If extensive transcription is necessary, however, the process may be time-consuming and/or expensive. Audio records are also a useful back-up when field notes or interview notes are taken: it is possible to make sketchier notes at the time and to play the audio record to fill out notes later.

*Video recording* is similarly useful, and in the same way as audio records. Video provides a great deal more information about what is going on in a site—it can provide a great deal more contextualising information to supplement what is said by participants (for example, about people’s locations, about set-ups of equipment or materials, about non-verbal behaviour, or about how people group). While video

records are richer than audio records for such purposes, this richness comes at a price: they are correspondingly more complex to transcribe and analyse. Video recorders can be free-standing and record a whole meeting or lesson, for example, or be hand-held and focus on specific kinds of events. The person holding a video recorder might be a teacher in another teacher's class, or a student or a community member. Different people can take responsibility for pointing the camera and deciding what will be recorded. Video records, like photographs, can also be very good stimulus materials to prompt discussion (in research group meetings, or in interviews—for example with focus groups of students) of particular kinds of events or incidents.

*Photographs* are useful for recording 'critical incidents', aspects of class activity, or to support other forms of recording or recorded commentary. Many different kinds of participants (teachers, leaders, students, community members) can *take* photographs, and many different kinds of participants can *respond* to them (as stimulus materials in interviews, for example—called 'stimulated recall' interviews). They are often useful for stimulating the kind of conversation that helps to reveal differences of perspective within and between different kinds of participants.

Many of these kinds of evidence can be collected with mobile phones, iPads, tablets and other digital devices. Some are more specialised—like excellent digital voice recorders and camcorders. They are also easy and familiar for people to use—young students, teachers, and family and community members.

#### 5. *Dataplay and fotonovela*

Riecken et al. (2006) created "fictionalized conversations" as a story of their journey working as academics with Aboriginal youth on a health and wellness project to raise awareness about health issues affecting students' communities. Together, the academics and the students chose verbatim excerpts from interviews, video clips, field notes and journals to create digital stories to re-present multiple participants' voices. Their goal was to determine the best ways to illuminate who the participants were and their experiences. They described the process of negotiating to co-create these fictionalized accounts as a kind of 'data-play'.

Another interesting multimodal form of representing evidence is "fotonovela" (Emme et al. 2006). This is a visual storyboard of participants' thoughts (thought balloons) and statements (speech balloons) that can be compared to a comic format and can be created in hard copy or print as well as digital form. It was used by Emme et al. (2006) to depict elementary immigrant children's experiences of their first days in school. It illuminated what these students felt and thought, and provided evidence of their experiences of school that afforded teachers, students and administrators an opportunity to consider what to do to support better such students entry into a new environment.

#### 6. *Document analysis*

Document analysis aims to yield an interpretation of an issue based on a critical reading of relevant documents found in a site. There is a great variety in the kinds of documents analysed by different people: policy documents, research papers, letters, memoranda to staff, circulars to parents, a school's prospectus, the documents

on noticeboards, students' work, electronic records, test papers, timetables, student files, school records, reports, committee meeting agenda and papers, and so on. The documents analysed differ from the kinds of records mentioned earlier in that they usually occur 'naturally' in the setting—they are not created specifically for, and as part of, a research process. They are usually things written or read (sometimes heard or said) as part of the ordinary life of the setting or institution, but now being interrogated to see whether they contain evidence relevant to a question or issue or concern being explored through the research. There is also a variety of ways to analyse documents, from highly theorised approaches (like conversation analysis or critical discourse analysis) through to more pragmatic approaches guided by practical experience concerning the question or issue or concern being investigated, and even impressionistic approaches.

### 7. *Questionnaires and surveys*

Questionnaires are composed of written questions requiring written responses. Questions can be of three general types:

- *Closed or multi-choice*—asking respondents to choose which sentence or description is closest to their own opinion, feelings, judgement, position and so on.
- *Ratings*—asking respond to rate degrees of agreement—numerous varieties are possible (Likert scales—rating on a five or seven point scale from totally agree to totally disagree, for example—are an overused example).
- *Open*—asking for information or opinions in respondents' own words. These questions are useful for exploration and for explanation: to begin exploration of a topic, or to explain an answer given to a closed question or a rating. Responses to open ended questions can be difficult to collate. Response rates may also be low. They are better than closed questions or ratings in revealing how respondents think—in their own terms rather than in terms of the categories imposed by the language of the questions.

Questions must be carefully phrased and their intention clear and unambiguous. Trialling questions (on peers or a small sample of respondents) will invariably suggest improvements. Restricting the number of questions asked and the range of topics covered generally increases response rates and the quality of information received. It is essential to ask only those questions that respondents have the knowledge to answer.

You should consider whether you want to ask everyone in a group (or 'population') to answer all questions, or whether it is sufficient to ask only a *sample* of people in the group. If a sample would be sufficient, you need to decide whether it should be a *random sample* (individuals chosen at random from a list, for example by using a random number generator) or a *purposive sample* (people chosen purposefully because they have some characteristic that makes them more appropriate as respondents—for example, because they have a child with special needs, because they are a girl, because they have been to the museum ...). If sampling, you may need to decide how large a sample to use (for example what percentage of the students). If you plan to use *analytic statistics* (comparing the means of different groups, for example), and not just *descriptive statistics* (like means, medians, and

variance or the spread of results) in analysing the results, you will need to be attentive to the sample size—and have greater numbers the more comparisons you want to make between groups.

You may also want to consider using a product like SurveyMonkey to help you with your questionnaire. In one critical participatory action research initiative, students walked around with an iPad collecting responses from other students using SurveyMonkey, which displayed the results of their survey more or less immediately.

In our view, surveys are over-used. They can and do give a picture of things like students' or teachers' or parents' attitudes or levels of satisfaction with things, but they may also fix thinking about how well things are going. In critical participatory action research, we are usually collecting evidence about ourselves and other participants, and surveys may not be the best way to collect this information—unless just to get people talking about a topic, for example. Surveys—especially short and focused surveys—can be useful to show change in attitudes or opinions or levels of satisfaction over time, after we have made changes in our practices.

#### 8. *Interaction schedules and checklists*

These may be used by a teacher or by an observer, in classrooms, meetings and other settings. They may be time-based, where recording is done at regular intervals or event-based, where recording is done whenever a particular event occurs (for example, when a question is asked by the teacher). Various behaviours are recorded in categories as they occur, ordinarily to build a picture of sequences or of types of teacher and pupil behaviour. Categories on schedules or checklists may refer to such things as:

- The *verbal or non-verbal behaviours* of participants in a meeting or lesson, for example—who is speaking and how often, who has the 'air-time', the demeanour of the chairperson, are the principles of public spheres observed?
- *Teacher verbal behaviour*—for example, asking a question, explaining, disciplining (individuals or groups).
- *Student verbal behaviour*—for example, answering, asking a question, interjecting, making a joke.
- *Teacher non-verbal behaviour*—for example, smiling, frowning, gesturing, writing, standing near the 'high-achievers', sitting with 'low-achievers'.
- *Student non-verbal behaviour* Turning around, walking about, writing, drawing, scribbling, laughing, crying.

Schedules and checklists may be used 'live' or to gather evidence from audio or video recordings of lessons or meetings, for example.

#### 9. *Student work samples and assessment tasks*

Collecting and analysing students' work samples is an excellent way to explore the 'harvest' of teaching, or of a curriculum—what students have taken from it. The type of assessment being used—a report, an essay, a multiple choice quiz, etc. determines and limits (in different ways) what opportunities the students have to demonstrate about their learning. We encourage teachers analysing students' work samples to make a distinction between the *assessment* of student learning, which is

usually done to determine how well a student has learned something, and the *evaluation* of student learning, which is done to illuminate the relationships between teaching (what was taught and how), curriculum (what was intended or meant to be taught), assessment (what was assessed by the particular assessment types actually used) and what students learned. The evaluation of student learning provides a powerful guide to teaching, to curriculum and to assessment.

- Consideration of the alignment between assessment tasks and curriculum statements and teaching and learning activities gives powerful insight into whether and how teaching or curriculum or assessments give students adequate opportunities to learn what is intended—over a term, over a year and over the school trajectory of individual students. What do students think assessment tasks are for?
- A wide variety of assessment tasks can provide information about student achievement—variety itself gives an indication of the relationship between the curriculum and what teachers, students, parents and others think is important.
- Tests of student performance—tests may be used to assess achievement or mastery, or to diagnose special needs or weaknesses. Tests may be made by teachers themselves or constructed by test developers.

### *Some Cautionary Notes*

All of the approaches to gathering information can generate large amounts of evidence. This is good, but you must focus on your felt concern in order to focus your information gathering on two major goals, finding out what is happening that is relevant to your understanding and also to inform what you might do next—in changing your practice and participating constructively in the group or groups with whom you are working. Changing the way information is gathered, amassed and represented in your action research setting is very much a political activity and it is extremely important that your changing practice and changing ways of thinking about information are subjected to ethical scrutiny and negotiated with participants and others who might be involved in or affected by the action research project. If you are student at a university doing action research as part of a research degree you will almost certainly be required to obtain ‘ethics clearance’ for your work. Major educational research associations such as the Australian Association for Educational Research, the British Educational Research Association, and the American Educational Research Association, provide guidance about these principles and processes.

Be aware also that educators in many countries now have various professional standards that govern their work as professional employees. Many of these professional standards expect what might be called ‘an action research stance’ in educators’ work so there is no likely conflict between action research and professional standards. However, it is wise to ensure that you are aware of the ways in which your own employment professional standards define issues such as confidentiality, privacy and conducting research practices in your employment as an educator.

Critical participatory action researchers face some different issues from conventional researchers. If you have not already done so, you should consult

- *Resource 2: Some notes on research ethics for critical participatory action researchers,*
- *Resource 3: Critical participatory action research group protocols: Ethical agreements for participation in public spheres, and*
- *Resource 4: Principles of procedure for action researchers.*

## Resource 7: Reporting: For Yourself and Others

The fundamental purpose in critical participatory action research is working with others to make a shared social practice more coherent, just, rational, informed, satisfying and sustainable. There are numerous advantages in a variety of writing and other kinds of publication in supporting and reporting a critical participatory action research initiative. Because of this, there is a variety of ways of representing action research. There are various ways of reporting and genres of reports, each of which can contribute to creating the public meaning of your work.

*Audiences* for reporting include your co-participants, your colleagues, your school or other organisation, parents, community members, the education community generally, a research community, and people who share the concern which led to your critical participatory action research project.

There are many *issues*, ethical, practical and political, that arise when reporting critical participatory action research. *Resource 2: Some notes on research ethics for critical participatory action researchers, Resource 3: Critical participatory action research group protocols* and *Resource 4: Principles of procedure for action researchers* address many ethical and political issues relevant to reporting critical participatory action research. There are two key points to remember about reporting, however: participants in critical participatory action research initiatives must be open with each other from the outset (including about whether reports are to be written and for whom), and any public reporting in any medium must be negotiated with the people whose work and lives are represented.

It is also important to remember, as all report-writers must, that reports begin to have a life of their own as soon as they are written. They represent things about a project and setting at the time the report was written, but their currency diminishes as time passes—they become progressively more untrue of the practices, the people and the setting. This decay means that reports become misrepresentations of practices or people or setting as time passes. Reports also mean very different things to people in a setting, those who observe it from nearby, and those who do not know the setting at all. For instance, while anonymisation may obscure the identities of people involved for audiences at a distance from the setting, it means little for people who live and work in the setting (they are likely to be identifiable to one another). And readers may have very different points of view from people in the

setting: what seems uncontroversial to people inside the setting may seem strange or even scandalous to some audiences outside it. It is difficult for the authors of reports to control the use that will be made of reports (including selective quoting and misquoting, and taking and using comments out of context) in other settings and circumstances. Some of these problems are true of any kind of reporting, not just reports of critical participatory action research, but authors of action research reports need to be conscious about how they and their co-researchers might be represented or misrepresented on the basis of what appears in reports.

We have sometimes been asked about the credibility of critical participatory action research reports written by participants about their own work. Someone will say something like “Self-reports always lack credibility”. We understand the point that is being made: sometimes, people do try to present themselves in only a positive light when they report on their own work. Our response to the charge that self-reports lack credibility is to ask why, when people try intelligently, diligently and sincerely to reflect on their own practices, their understandings of their practices, and the conditions under which they practise, they should be *more* rather than *less* prone to misunderstand themselves than others, or *more* rather than *less* likely to misrepresent their practices, their understandings and their situations than someone who doesn’t know them or their work—someone who might be thought to be ‘objective’. We think critical participatory action researchers, as participants in their own practices, have a privileged vantage point from which to understand it. It doesn’t mean they can’t be wrong about themselves, or that they will fail to anticipate some ways in which others will interpret their writings, but at least they have privileged access to what they *intend*. They generally *can and do* tell *their own* stories best, whether or not theirs are the *best-told* stories.

Before a report is circulated, or distributed, or published, we urge critical participatory action researchers to share drafts with colleagues and critical friends. They will often spot problems or issues that may arise when outsiders read the report. Apart from other readerly feedback you might ask them to give you, you might also ask them to mark passages they think could be misinterpreted by others, or by someone hostile to the kind of work going on in your critical participatory action research initiative. It is also a good idea to have a friend—someone not directly involved in work like the work being reported on—to read a draft. They can usually provide helpful comments on what does and doesn’t make sense, and what does or doesn’t seem sensible.

### ***Reporting Action Research Undertaken as Part of a Course of Study***

Sometimes, participants in action research projects are students studying for undergraduate pre-service degrees, or educators and others writing postgraduate theses or dissertations. Writing for degree qualifications must observe the kinds of principles outlined in *Resources 2, 3 and 4*, but might be quite different and distinct from

writing designed for the progress of the critical participatory action research initiative itself. (There is an easily found literature of experience with writing theses and dissertations on action research that we will not summarise here.)

The questions we have posed in Tables 5.1, 5.2, 6.1 and 6.2 to provide an initial guide to gathering information are all in the first person, of the general kind: ‘How is *my* thinking and the thinking of others changing ...?’ Every participant in the action research will be asking similar questions in the same form. Everyone needs to think about what he or she *and* others are thinking and doing; there is no chance of a shared project without that agreement. That is, everyone will be thinking about, and sometimes documenting, what others are saying. A person who is writing a dissertation or thesis from a critical participatory action research initiative may be studying and documenting what others are doing more carefully and explicitly than others in the setting. It is essential that the thesis writer is not involved in *two* projects—the first a critical participatory action research initiative being conducted with other co-participants, and the second an undisclosed, un-negotiated study of other participants. It is legitimate, however, for the thesis writer to document for example, his or her own “I am learning ...” statements, and, *after negotiation with other participants*, to collect the “I am learning ...” and other similar statements made by other participants.

Tables 5.1, 5.2, 6.1 and 6.2, invite the observation, recording and ultimately reporting of the views of participants and others, but only as part of the same case study of critical participatory action research practice. It may be practical to organise your journal in a way that allows your own voice and the voices of others to be heard—but note that recording observations about others may require their consent.

## **Resource 8: Choosing an Academic Partner to Work with a Critical Participatory Action Research Initiative**

Sometimes, critical participatory action researchers choose to have a ‘critical friend’ to observe and comment on the progress of their research. They choose someone who will be constructively critical, and who will give them confidential advice. Sometimes they also choose someone who will be capable of disrupting at least some of the things that might be taken for granted by people who ordinarily live and work in the setting.

In Chap. 1, we pointed out that working with an outside consultant can lead to problems for ‘insiders’ in a critical participatory action research initiative. An academic partner may be insulated from the real-world consequences of participation in the setting for other participants—whether in educational, social or industrial settings. Outside consultants and collaborators can provide valuable support to participant researchers, and they can also, for the purposes of the research, *become* engaged participants alongside others in an action research initiative. They need not ordinarily be members of a community undertaking an action research initiative, or employees of an organisation in which an action research initiative happens, but

they can be full participants in the life of the research. If so, they must remain critically alert to a particular danger of self-deception: that they may be self-deceived about the extent to which their own self-interests and the self-interests of other participants overlap. One strategy that can help address the danger of self-deception is for outside consultants to find critical friends (or key informants) from among the other participants who can help them counter the danger of self-deception by opening communicative space for honest talk about how different participants see things, and about how different participants' self-interests are affected by what is going on in the research. Similarly, on the side of the outside consultant, empathetic understanding and humanitarian compassion towards the perspectives, self-interests and circumstances of insiders can also help counter outsiders' self-deception.

As stated in Chap. 1, a crucial aspiration of critical participatory action research is that the research, in all of its phases, should be the responsibility of participants alone. Although participants also remain open to receiving assistance from outsiders where it is useful, both participants and outside consultants should return regularly to the key question of whether and to what extent the self-interests of outside consultants coincide or conflict with the self-interests of other participants.

If you think you might want to appoint an 'academic partner' as a critical friend to your critical participatory action research initiative, then you might be interested in the advice below. It is couched specifically in terms of academic partners working with schools, but the advice is readily applicable to other settings (for example, a critical participatory action research initiative undertaken by nurses in an aged care facility, or an initiative undertaken by a group of community social workers, or people who work together in a commercial firm).

In 2002 and 2003, Susan Groundwater-Smith and Stephen Kemmis (2004) conducted a meta-evaluation of the New South Wales (Australia) Department of Education and Training *Priority Action Schools Program (PASP)*, which provided substantial additional funding for 74 schools in some of the most challenging circumstances in the state. The schools used the additional funding they received generally to appoint extra staff to help with issues they confronted—usually one to three additional staff members.

The Program required that each of the 74 participating schools appoint an academic partner who worked for some days (often a few hours a week) with the school as a critical friend, helping mostly with documentation and report writing, and sometimes with advice on the particular innovations the schools were making in their work. Most academic partners came from university faculties of education; some were independent consultants. After reviewing evidence collected from 33 academic partners, and reviewing the work the schools had done as part of their involvement in the Program, Groundwater-Smith and Kemmis (2004, pp. 122–124) drew up the following propositions (quoted here in full) as advice to schools who might think in future of appointing academic partners.

- It is desirable if, before the particular partnership project begins, academic partners already have *good, established working relationships* with the school or schools they intend to work with—having prior knowledge of the school, its

staff and students, and its context is an advantage for partners, and having prior knowledge of the work, credibility and expertise of partners is an advantage for schools.

- It is desirable if academic partners already have an established *record of working well with schools*, with capacities to
  - be open and responsive to local school concerns and issues,
  - offer leadership (and to support and extend leadership by others in all roles),
  - offer structure and support in helping the school to organise and manage its development process (help with project management),
  - offer expertise in action inquiry and school self-evaluation processes,
  - provide substantive consultancy support in some of the areas in which schools aim to change,
  - establish good personal-professional relationships with a diverse range of people in the school and its community,
  - be able to ‘stand back’ when appropriate to offer interpretive (and sometimes critical) perspectives which help people to re-frame and re-think current ideas and practices and ways of doing things, and at times be an audience for regular reports from participants (helping to establish a rhythm of progress reporting),
  - be positive and affirming wherever possible, to support the sense of worth and the professional self-understandings of participants,
  - to be regarded as a constructively critical friend whose celebration of progress and achievements will be credible and encouraging to participants,
  - be willing to use their skills in documenting, analysing, conceptualising and writing to help schools prepare reports, whether as constructively critical readers, editors, or co-authors with the school (though great care should be taken about writing accounts of the school on its behalf, since this may mean taking from the school its responsibility for representing itself), and
  - be, and be seen by people in the school to be, learners themselves—people committed to learning about *this* school, *these* staff and students, *this* community, and the school development process.
- It is desirable for schools and academic partners to *begin a potential partnership relationship positively but cautiously*, with options on both sides to say ‘no’ if the relationship doesn’t ‘feel right’.
- It is desirable for schools and potential academic partners to *explore the particular strengths and needs for expertise each brings to the relationship*, and for schools to recognise that they may need particular skills or expertise that a potential partner does not have. In such cases, schools and potential partners may need to seek alternative or additional partners or consultancy support.
- It is essential for schools and academic partners to *build clear, shared understandings of goals, roles and expectations of one another*, perhaps formalising these in an agreement or contract, but always leaving room for the relationship to evolve and for goals, roles and expectations to be renegotiated as the relationship develops, circumstances change, and new opportunities and challenges arise.

- It is essential that schools and academic partners *establish clear expectations about the time and duration of the project*—how much time the partner needs to commit and over what period—*leaving open the option of renegotiation* and continuation after a predetermined period, and about the routine of visits to be expected.
- It is essential that schools and academic partners *establish relationships based on mutual trust, recognition and respect*. Each should have clear understandings of what they and the other are responsible for. Even though participating in the collaboration with conviction and commitment, it is essential that academic partners recognise that school improvement is a matter for which the school itself is ultimately responsible.
- It is essential that *schools should regard themselves as knowledge based organisations, valuing and practising professional dialogue and discourse* as part of their everyday work, and in training and development activities based on learning and sharing knowledge. While some evidence of this comes from dialogue within the school, it is and should be enriched by contact with external sources of ideas and expertise ...
- It is essential that, *within schools, principals and the school executive should have a shared commitment to action inquiry into, monitoring, and critical self-evaluation* of the development project they are undertaking. The principal and executive must *champion* these tasks for participating teachers. Similarly, principals, members of the school executive and participating staff must have a shared and collaborative commitment to working cooperatively with academic partners, evidenced by school staff taking responsibility for their share of the development and self-evaluation work rather than regarding it as something to be ‘sub-contracted’ to academic partners.
- It is essential that academic partners *not* use or represent the work done with the school as if it were entirely their own work and not the product of their collaborative work with the school. *The school should always be aware of, and give permission for, any use by the academic partner of any relevant material arising from the collaboration, not unreasonably withholding permission for its use, but expecting that the school’s contribution will properly be acknowledged. The academic partner has the same right* with respect to the use or representation by the school of any material generated through the collaboration.

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