

Chapter Three: finding an appropriate vehicle

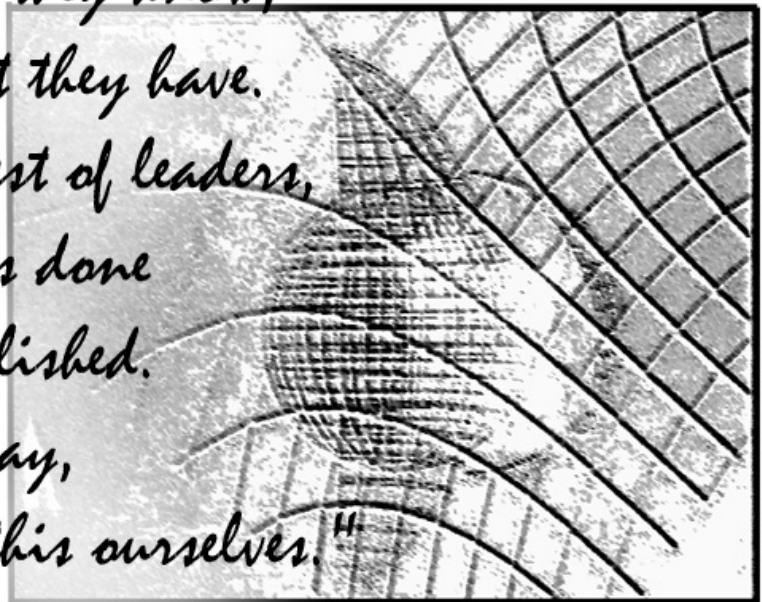
*Go to the People, live with them,
learn from them, love them.*

*Start with what they know,
Build with what they have.*

*..But with the best of leaders,
when the work is done
the task accomplished.*

The people will say,

"We have done this ourselves."



Lao Tzu, China 700 BC



Introduction

I have set the boundaries of this map by describing the current context and by discussing the issues that are affecting decision-making within the arts and cultural sector in South Australia. I now set about trying to find the most appropriate methodological vehicle to embark on our journey across this mapped country.

I do not separate my scientific inquiry from my life. For me it is really a quest for life, to understand life and to create what I call living knowledge—knowledge which is valid for the people with whom I work and for myself.

(Swantz quoted in Reason & Bradbury 2001, p.1)

The setting up of the Advisory Group was a crucial element in this research. I spread the word through both formal and informal channels that I was embarking on some interesting research and needed peer support. I encouraged artswomen as they self selected by showing their support. The five who became the Advisory Group, were from diverse artform backgrounds and had made long-standing commitments to the development of the arts sector. Their artform experiences were extensive and covered visual art/craft, performing arts, theatre for young people, literature and community arts. The range of job descriptions that they were able to represent includes educator, manager, artist, craftsperson, cultural consultant, community artswoman, writer, editor and director. They have also sat on boards of management for arts organisations.

In reviewing methodological options with the Advisory Group, we were of the opinion that the typical approaches to social research were top-down models. In order to meet the

exacting standards of science, it is suggested that the professional researcher exercise maximum control over the research process, from the initial design to the conclusions, and the recommendations emerging from the study. This approach presented difficulties for what we had set out to achieve. I was endeavoring to make links between academia and practice so the relationship between researcher and researched needed to be less hierarchical. We searched for an alternative.

A range of different methodologies were explored and discounted in the pursuit of the best vehicle for this research project. I discounted any empirical approaches as I found it too difficult to paint such an intricate image as the arts through the limited palette of number crunching. And although I pursued the idea of case studies for a period, they did not offer a way of covering such a diverse sector as the arts. As stated in the chapter one, I also had three personal starting points. I am:

- a practical person who likes action
- an activist interested in changing the world
- a practitioner dedicated to collaborative work

My interest in activism and the pursuit of cultural democracy led me to Foucault (1991) who recommends studying power operations at local, and via bottom-up, perspectives. The term action research kept appearing in the literature I was exploring. The philosophy of this approach seemed right. Reason and Bradbury (2001) describe action research as:

...a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities. (Reason & Bradbury 2001, p.1)

After much discussion with both my supervisors and my Advisory Group, Action Research (AR) was deemed the most appropriate method for undertaking this journey.

This chapter gives a brief history of action research and outlines the breadth of different approaches that fall under the heading of action research. It discusses research as an agent of change and looks at some of the explorations that are currently called practitioners research. It then describes participatory action research and outlines the rationale for its use within this project. It discusses the use of research cycles and outlines some of the ethical considerations and validity issues that arise when using participatory action research.



description of Action Research

Although the roots of action research (AR) are evident very early in the 20th century, most commentators regard Kurt Lewin as its major pioneer (Checkland 1981). Lewin was born in Germany in 1890. He trained in psychology in Berlin, which led to a Ph.D. in the experimental study of associative learning. This early work developed further when in 1932 he visited the United States of America as a visiting professor and stayed.

Lewin first used the term 'action research' in a paper called *Action Research and Minority Problems* in 1946. This paper describes AR as 'a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action and research leading to social action' (Lewin 1946, p.41). He went on to describe the process as a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action' (Lewin 1946, p.42). Lewin was a social and experimental psychologist. His work dealt with social issues, and he used participative group processes for addressing conflict, crises, and change. Many of the pioneers of this research approach were, during 20th

century, undertaking socio-psychological studies of social and work-life issues within organisations.

Many others have also contributed to the development of action research. McTaggart (1991) in *Action Research- short modern history* outlines the education research work of John Dewey. He comments on how Dewey challenged research practices: 'Dewey's demystification, domestication and democratisation of the scientific method was a direct challenge to the professionalisation of research' (McTaggart 1991, p.2). As well as introducing the notion of participation: 'Dewey saw it as essential that ordinary citizens could join with professionals in respectable programs of inquiry and reform' (McTaggart 1991, p.2). McTaggart suggests that although Dewey was criticized for his somewhat utopian view, he was well recognized for the articulation of his vision.

Another name that appears in the literature about Action Research is that of John Collier, the U.S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs from 1933 to 1945. French and Bell (1995) report that Collier found that making changes in ethnic relations '...was an extremely difficult process and required *joint effort* on the part of the scientist (researcher), the administrator (practitioner) and the layman (client)' (French & Bell 1995, p.144).

Eric Trist who worked at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in Britain was another major contributor to the field. After World War II he was engaged in applied social research with German prisoners of war. O'Brien (1998) McKernan (1991) and French & Bell (1995) also suggest that Lippit (1951) and Lippit & Radke (1946) were major contributors to the thinking of the time.

Another key person was the inventor of group dynamics, sociodrama and psychodrama, Moreno. Moreno was born Moreno Nisslam Levy in 1889 in Bucharest, but he later changed his name to Jacob Levi Moreno. He studied medicine in Vienna and founded the Theatre of Spontaneity. In 1925 he traveled to the United States of America (McGovern 1983, pp.55-59). Moreno's work in the field of psychodrama is often linked to social action and activism. His work involved among others, groups of children, prostitutes,

prisoners and veterans. Stephen Kemmis (1993) suggests that Moreno's activist style was influential on Lewin's developing ideas of action research.

Action research is not a methodology that has developed along one path. It is responsive in nature and therefore spreads out in a number of different areas of practice and number of different methods of working. Commentators such as Whitehead (1998) note that it would be misleading to suggest there is a unified movement known as 'Action Research'. He writes:

If you look around the world at the increase in action research publications over the past ten years you will be faced by action researchers who acknowledge widely differing influences on their work. In the UK you will find all of these different influences at work. You will find action researchers predominantly influenced by the critical theories of Jurgen Habermas (Carr & Kemmis 1986), those influenced by the curriculum theory of Lawrence Stenhouse and the hermeneutics of Han-Georg Gadamer (Elliott, 1991; Somekh, 1994), those who claim to be creating their own living educational theories grounded in their own questions of the kind, 'how do I improve what I am doing?' (Lomax, 1998; Laidlaw, 1996; Evans, 1995; Parker, 1998; Whitehead, 1996) and those who are creating participatory forms of action research in relation to organisational, community and societal learning (Marshall 1996; Reason 1994). (Whitehead, 1998, p.2)

In an article called *Professional, Personal, and Political Dimensions of Action Research* Noffke writes:

Rather than a particular research methodology, action research is best thought of as a large family, one in which beliefs and relationships vary greatly. More than a set of discrete practices, it is a group of ideas emergent in various contexts... (Noffke 1997, p. 306)

Dick (1993) arranges the diverse approaches to action research into four basic categories.

- Participatory action research (PAR) with its strong links back to the emancipatory work of activists. In Australia it is linked to the work of Kemmis & Mc Taggart (1988) and Carr (1986).
- Action Science which looks at the interaction of behavior in groups and organisational settings, and is linked to the work of Argyris (1985, 1991).
- Soft systems methodology as described by Checkland (1981, 1990) is often used in organisations in the analysis of information systems.
- Evaluation which is a loose grouping of a collection of evaluation methodologies as described by Guba and Lincoln (1989), Patton (1990) and Scriven (1991) (Dick 1993, pp. 42-65)

Lewin (1946) and more recently Whyte (1991 a&b) believed strongly that it is not possible to understand a social system without changing it. They both state that the passive observer cannot learn anything rational about the inner dynamics and conditions of systems. So it is the 'active' participant that is required. AR is often linked to activism. Activist movements, which have been established to facilitate change, recognise that in many situations, people need to first re-appropriate knowledge that has been lost or taken from them. It is only when this is achieved that they are able to develop their own skills and participate in the ongoing social production of knowledge. In *Research for Social Justice: Some North-South Convergences*, Fals Borda (1995) highlights the contributions that activists and participatory researchers working within the Third World have had the development of AR. He believes these workers brought with them a combination of praxis and phronesis, which he describes as a 'horizontal participation with peoples and wise judgment and prudence for the good life' (Fals-Borda 1995, p.15). AR work has by no means been limited, however to the Third World context. The practice of action research is found in many countries and is particularly well understood in the fields of education, health and more recently management. 'Action Research is a transnational, transcultural and transdisciplinary "movement" ' (McTaggart, 1996, p.2).

It is interesting to track ideas that have influenced action research in different ways. For example the social justice work of Freire (1979) in Brazil has fed into the work of social

researchers and adult educators using action research. In Australia there is Kemmis (1988); Gaventa (1993) and Brinton Lykes (1993) in the USA; Hall (1977) in Canada; while in Europe and Britain there are de Vries (1980), Reason (1994) and Carr (1986). Freire did not call his work action research, but as the list above suggests, many action researchers have been encouraged and inspired by his 'conscientisation' or conscience raising work with oppressed peoples. It is interesting to note that Freire has also been influential in the Community Cultural Development area. Although the link between activism and action research is strong, it is important to remember that they are not the same. As McTaggart writes in *Action Research- a short modern history*, 'It should be noted that activism that does not eventually take on the considered and reflective stance of action research conflicts with the fundamental principles of action research' (McTaggart 1991, p.49).

I looked to the other "isms" to explore connections to the development of action research. Reason & Bradbury state that 'we are part of the current shift from a "modern" to a "postmodern" world, and we need to engage with the current debate about worldviews and paradigms' (Reason & Bradbury 2001, p.4). Postmodernism is a contributing factor to the current questioning of research methods, as it questions the nature of social reality and the processes by which we can come to know about it. It throws into question many 'modern' perspectives based on scientific visions of a fixed and knowable world. 'From a postmodern perspective, attempts to order peoples lives on the basis of scientific knowledge largely constitute an exercise in power. Knowledge is as much about politics as it is about understanding' (Stringer 1996, p.150).

Feminism has influenced both our society and our methods of social research. In *Feminism and Social Change: Bridging Theory and Practice* editor Gottfried (1996) examines how feminist research constitutes a political practice, whereby the fundamental goal is to change women's lives through the production and dissemination of knowledge. In an article *Developing a Feminist Participative Research Framework: Evaluating the Process* Martin (1994) describes the influence of Freire's notion of critical pedagogy on women's education in Britain. Her research with a women's health group has used a

feminist participatory methodology based on Freire's theories of oppression and liberation. While Alison Bowes (1996) in her article *'Evaluating an Empowering Research Strategy: Reflections on Action-Research with South Asian Women'*, finds similarities between anti-racist sociology, feminist sociology and action-research. This article suggests that they share a concern with empowerment of 'the researched'.

Action research and practitioners research has also been linked. Action research may and often does involve practitioners as researchers or participants. And the practitioner researcher is often guided by the work of Lewin and Freire. Examples of both can be found in education and health (Fuller & Petch 1995; Hess & Mullen 1995; Jenkins 1992; Padget 1998; Robson 1995). In relation to the social work field, Jenkins proposed that the profession needs to look at:

... the gaps between practice and research, valid concerns of each, and the ways in which the methodologies of the two can be not integrated but intertwined, to find the kind of answers needed for addressing contemporary problems. (Jenkins 1992, p.263)

This comment is encouraging the use of a practitioner research. It could however be equally suggesting an action research approach. In a paper called *Practitioner Centred Research (PCR)* Bourner and O'Hara write that 'PCR is a process for converting personal learning from developments in professional practice, into shared knowledge available to all' (Bourner & O'Hara 1998, p.2). In the same article these writers are also keen to explain that PCR is not action research. Action research was definitely the shape of the vehicle I was seeking and although practitioners' research was familiar and attractive it did not seem to have all the necessary features, so the search continued.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is an approach that embraces activism by encouraging a group of participants in their quest to make a change in their situation. PAR is 'learning by doing' (Wadsworth 1998). It requires a group of people, (which includes the researcher as participant) to identify a problem. They then move through a series of learning cycles that use a plan-act-observe-reflect format with the aim of

improving the problem (Kemmis & McTaggart 1988). PAR can be seen as a more holistic approach to problem-solving or making change, rather than a single method for collecting and analyzing data (O'Brien 1998).

Dick (1993) describes action research as both action and research. Action to make change and research to add to the collective knowledge bank. This is different from daily problem solving or undertaking creative activity, as there is research component. It is the study of a problem through a systematic approach and then the integration of what has been learnt during the action research cycles, that makes action research - research.

PAR is often seen as a collective learning process. But does the action associated with practice inform theory or is practice informed by knowledge? In *An Overview of the Methodological Approach of Action Research*, O'Brien answers this by stressing the need for both. He uses the terms Praxis and Theoria. Praxis, a term used by Aristotle:

...is the art of acting upon the conditions one faces in order to change them. It deals with the disciplines and activities predominant in the ethical and political lives of people. Aristotle contrasted this with Theoria - those sciences and activities that are concerned with knowing for its own sake. Both are equally needed he thought. (O'Brien 1998, p.11)

The cyclic nature of Action Research also acknowledges both elements as important features of seeking knowledge and making change.

Carr and Kemmis (1986) have an interesting way of recognizing an action research project. They argue that three conditions are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for action research to be said to exist:

- firstly, a project takes as its subject matter a social practice, regarding it as a form of strategic action susceptible of improvement;

- secondly, the project proceeds through a spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, with each of these activities being systematically and self-critically implemented and interrelated;
- thirdly, the project involves those responsible for the practice in each of the moments of the activity, widening participation in the project gradually to include others affected by the practice, and maintaining collaborative control of the process. (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p.165)

A challenge for all participatory action researchers is to design a process, which can result in maximum creativity and imagination (Wadsworth 1998) and yet maintain the balance between research methods and research process. In *Participatory Research: Whose roles, whose responsibilities?* Dockery suggests that with participatory research '...the concern about research methods is secondary, whereas concern for the research process is dominant...!' (Dockery 2000, p. 97). Stringer (1996) also emphasizes the importance of the process when he writes:

Community-based action research seeks to change the social and personal dynamics of the research situation so that it is non-competitive and non-exploitative and enhances the lives of all those who participate. (Stringer 1996, p.19)

PAR encourages the actual experience of taking responsibility for attempting to initiate change. It is combining academic knowledge with practitioners' experience and know-how. Fals-Borda writes: 'The study of society is not worth the trouble if it does not help its members to grasp the meaning of their lives and to move to action for progress, peace and prosperity for all ' (Fals-Borda 1995, p.17).

As groups of people conduct research on issues that matter to them, they are changing power relations by controlling the research processes that have historically been used to control them, and by recognizing that the knowledge they generate can be used to support broader social struggles. This may also place them in a position to report on the process in a more accessible format. Fals-Borda sees this as a commitment to 'share what you

have learned together with the people, in a manner that is wholly understandable and even literary and pleasant' (Fals-Borda 1995, p.9). Willis echoes this in the area of adult education when he describes researchers tools which are not 'the surgeon's analytical scalpel but the poetic pen or artists brush, called upon to produce focused, expressive work' (Willis 2002, p.7).

Active participation is gaining credence within literature on management, as it is starting to be recognized as beneficial to the running of organisations. Routio on the website *Arteology* highlights the following as probable causes for the link between participation in research and profitability.

- Participation gives the researcher access to non-verbal knowledge, skills and experience possessed by people working in the fields. The perspective of the research project thus expands.
- If the research is expected to produce any results applicable to practice, this will most probably be achieved if the project is steered by people with solid practical experience
- In participating research, there will be fewer ethical problems. The extensive participation of different parties reduces the risk of the project causing inconvenience to some party. (Routio 2001)

Participation can mean more and /or more active informants, which could lead to richer data. This process of participant involvement in co-researching and interpreting data as it is revealed helps to highlight and challenge any assumptions held by the researcher.

PAR is often quoted as being more applicable than mainstream research methods in situations requiring responsiveness, flexibility and action. It may also prove to be more relevant for practitioners such as artswokers. Much of arts practice encourages tasks that seek to know something more closely. Wadsworth (1998) states that what '..."drives" participatory action research, ... is our "need to know" in order to bring about desired change.' The aims of the two seem compatible.

The shape of our vehicle is becoming clearer, but how do you know if it will work? In collage, you try it out by placing it next to something different. I try this by exploring research currently being undertaken in the arts sector.

Within the arts there are also specific artforms and artworkers that focus on a broad exploration of social change. Community Artworkers often explore the community cultural development philosophies of community empowerment and cultural democracy. Arts research however has taken a much more traditional and positivist approach. The cultural research and development that is evident in some arts practice is less evident in the area of arts research. For instance, much arts research focuses on a specific function within a given section of the arts such as: marketing for the smaller arts organisations. A quick scan of the research undertaken and published by the Australia Council in the last 5 years shows an emphasis on research that is market and audience focused (Australia Council research publications [a]). With titles such as *'Research into Audience Development and Marketing Issues and Practices'*, *'Research into international markets for performing arts'* and *'EU Database Protection and its implications to Australian Copyright Law'* suggests that small specific areas are researched but the larger philosophic questions related to arts and cultural practice are either left unasked and therefore unanswered or reinforcing existing answers.

The specific nature of arts research can mean that it lacks relevance to a wider audience. Ashton (1988) writes that research should, however, not only be concerned with its own process, but should be committed to disseminating results in ways that will help to improve the 'state of the art' (Ashton1988, online). In this way the research objectives are drawn in the light of the context in which the outcomes will be applied. It stands to reason then, that it would be beneficial to have both the researcher and artworkers involved in the development of the objectives and methodology.

Research in the arts often uses a decompositional approach (3), whereby the problem is divided up into parts and investigated separately. This approach has a couple of drawbacks. First the outcome of the research can be greatly influenced by the basic research assumptions. This could be overcome by taking a more holistic approach that calls on a range of views. This is necessary to paint the bigger picture before zooming in on a specific part of it. Zabriskie (1984) illustrates the dilemma of specialised knowledge in *Marketing research as a strategic tool* when he discusses the futility of having a great understanding of the function of the carburetor, if there is limited understanding of the potential of the engine on which it works.

The second problem with the decompositional approach is linked to the diversity of the arts. The arts have many creative players supplying a unique and diverse range of art product. Descriptions commonly used include visual, performing and community arts, craft, literature and new media. The sector also is committed to supporting artists at a range of different performance levels, from emerging artists to professional development for those who are mid-career to acknowledgment of those who have been gained long-term reputations. Each artform, each organisation, each stage of development for the growth of the artists, would portray a different landscape if describing their context. They would also describe a different set of tools for the shaping of their processes. All these differences make it difficult to generalize within arts research and therefore also difficult to communicate any findings to a general audience.

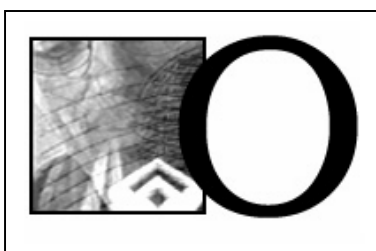
FOOTNOTE: (3) The use of decompositional rather than deconstructionist is deliberate. A different visual image haunts each word. Decompositional comes from decompose which is to 'separate into constituent elements or parts' while deconstruct 'seeks to expose deep-seated contradictions in a work by delving below its surface meaning' For me construct has a human hand in it and is seeking to study the parts in relation to the whole while decompositional is more organic and happy to study a single part of something that makes up a greater body.

Much traditional research is conducted within reasonably stable environments. The arts exists as a highly dynamic and uncertain environment, subject to many external forces.

In light of what happens in most research, this research needs to:

- maintain an open approach to the diversity of functions that occur within the arts
- embrace a holistic approach that tackles both strategic planning and implementation of objectives
- develop a framework that allows for the broad range of current thinking
- be relevant to its audiences
- be based on a continuous learning environment to accommodate ideas as they emerge

Reviewing the information thus far the Advisory Group agreed that the most appropriate methodology for our exploration was action research and that a participatory action research approach would guide my work with the arts and cultural community. So the vehicle was chosen with the knowledge that a few modifications were necessary and the panel beaters tools may need to accompany us on the journey to allow for a responsive approach along the way.

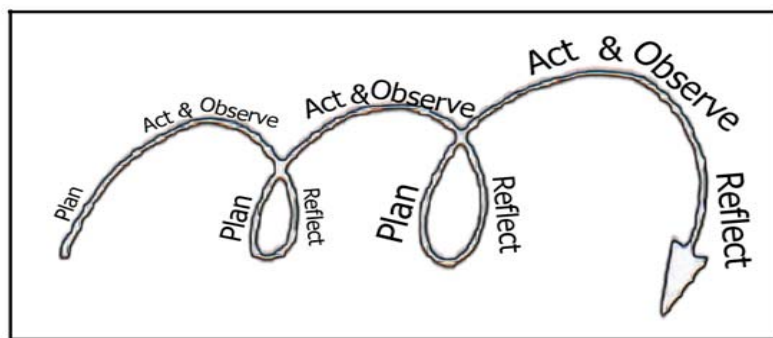


***ur 'make and model' of Action
Research***

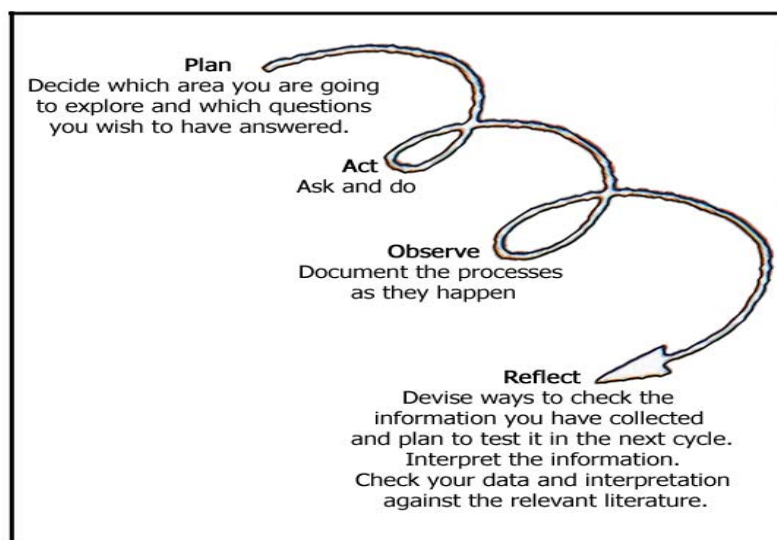
In its pursuit of understanding and change, and its use of participation, action research is unable to use the methods of experimental research to develop a warrant for its assertions. It requires a different approach. (Dick 1997)

Action research (AR) achieves this 'different approach' by being critically reflective in its use of a series of cycles. The researcher(s) also attempts to test the data as it is collected to assess and reassess emerging interpretations.

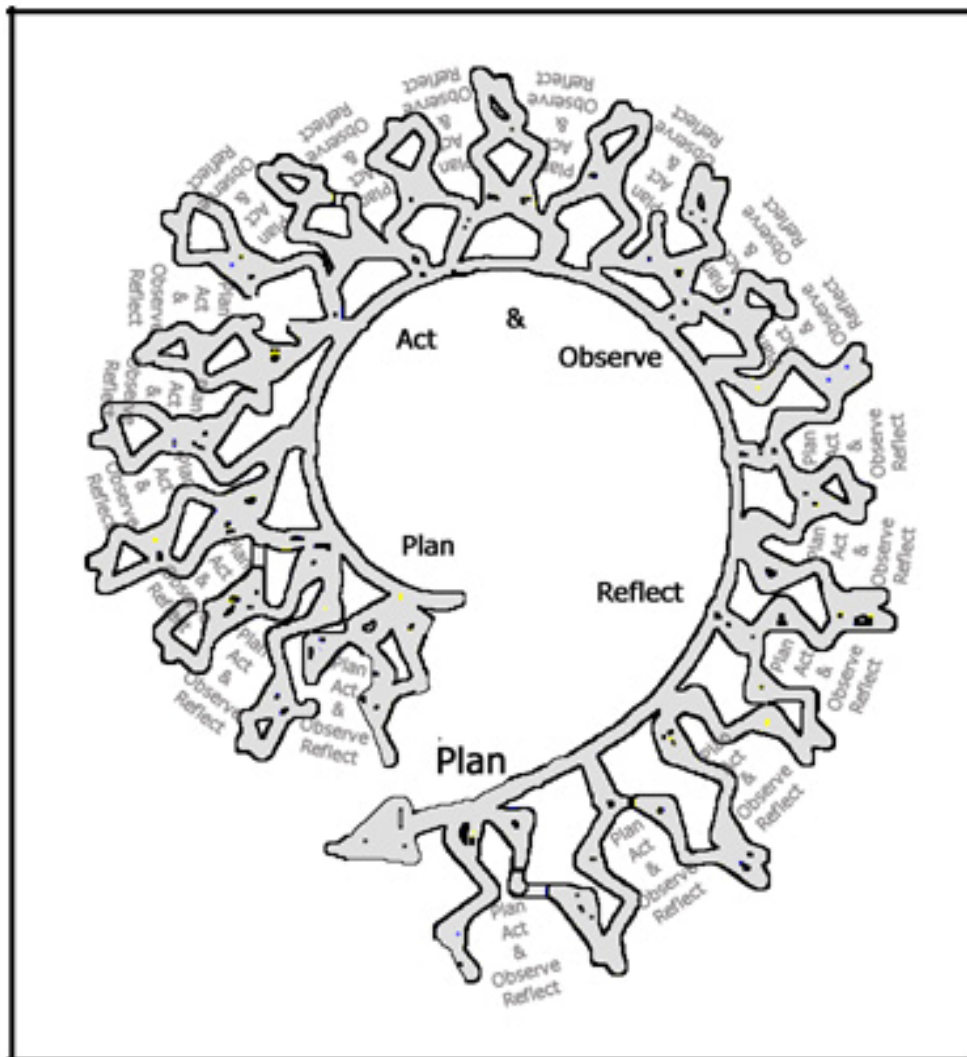
There are many versions of action research cycles. Most follow a simple format similar to the plan- act&observe- reflect suggested by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988 p.11).



And from my understanding each stage of the process has its own action spirals



It is important to realize that this is in fact a cyclic process and not just a checklist. It may be necessary to return to the 'plan' stage a number of times during any given cycle of the project. Action research is also cycles within cycles. So the image that forms for me is a complex set of spirals within spirals.



This project brought together groups of artswokers to use the plan- act- observe- reflect format of the AR cycles in a workshop situation. Many of the cycles involved participants in very active ways. We used a participatory action research (PAR) approach to explore issues related to decision making in the arts and cultural sector in South Australia.

The cycles that were developed for our research were first drafted as follows:

Cycle one

Background research and setting up of advisory group

Cycle two

Development of format for workshop which will generate and collect data
Creation of videos to act as discussion starters

Cycle three

Action research workshops to generate and collect data

Cycle four

Data analysis

Cycle five

Ratification by participants group

Cycle six

Prioritization by workshop participants and wider arts group

Cycle seven

Reflection on process and writing of thesis

Each cycle had its own Plan-Act-Observe-Reflect (PAOR)cycle within it.

Due to the nature of the research project this plan was modified a number of times.

Below are two versions that are closer to the research cycles that occurred.

The first is from the practitioner's point of view. Here the cycles are 'cycle of action' describing the PAOR approach from an active position.

Cycle one	Plan- Act & Observe - Reflect-	Develop structure for research process Undertake background research Conduct Literature Review Form Advisory Group Contextualise work so far
Cycle two	Plan- Act & Observe Reflect	Develop workshop format Make videos Present videos to supervisors Modify videos
Cycle three (cycle three was repeated for each workshop)	Plan Act & Observe Reflect	Recruit workshop participants Conduct workshop Write workshop summaries and modify workshop format
Cycle four	Plan Act & Observe Reflect	Research modes of data analysis Undertake content analysis Develop video presentation of process
Cycle five	Plan Act & Observe Reflect	Re-contact participants Form ratification group Conduct ratification workshop with participant group and Facilitate ongoing ratification process Contextualise results and write up report
Cycle six	Plan Act & Observe Reflect	Research and develop a Prioritization Matrix Test Matrix with Advisory Group Modify matrix
Cycle seven	Plan Act & Observe Reflect	Form Wider Art Sector Group Disseminate and Collect Prioritization Matrix Collate Matrix results
Cycle eight	Plan Act & Observe Reflect	Develop structure for thesis Write Present drafts to supervisors, advisory group and readers

(Cycle eight was in reality started early in the process and was then repeated for each draft)

The second is from the researcher's point of view.
 Here the cycles are 'cycle of research' describing the PAOR approach from an reflective position.

Cycle one Develop, Collect and Analyse Data	Plan- Act & Observe - Reflect-	Develop structure for research process Undertake background research Conduct Literature Review Form Advisory Group Contextualise work so far
	Plan- Act & Observe Reflect	Develop workshop format Make videos & Present to supervisors Modify videos
	Plan Act & Observe Reflect	Recruit workshop participants Conduct workshop Write workshop summaries and modify workshop format
	Plan Act & Observe Reflect	Research modes of data analysis Undertake content analysis Develop video presentation of process
Cycle two Ratify and Prioritize data summaries	Plan Act & Observe Reflect	Recontact participants and form ratification group Conduct ratification workshop with participant group and facilitate ongoing ratification process Contextualise results and write up report
	Plan Act & Observe Reflect	Research and develop a Prioritization Matrix Test Matrix with Advisory Group Modify matrix
Cycle three Test data summaries on wider sector group and write up	Plan Act & Observe Reflect	Form Wider Art Sector Group Disseminate and Collect Prioritization Matrix Collate Matrix results
	Plan Act & Observe Reflect	Develop structure for thesis Write Present drafts to supervisors, advisory group and readers

I have outlined these different approaches to the action research cycles to both emphasize the flexibility of this methodology and to illustrate the two sides to action research. The action-practitioner side and the research-academic side.

The Participatory Action Research process encourages a very close relationship between researcher and other participants. Stringer (1996) recognizes that community-based research has multiple outcomes and takes into account the need to enact ways of working that protect or enhance the dignity and identities of all people involved. The welfare and safety of the participants in the research groups was discussed and maintained within each group. On any journey there are risks involved and when imparting on an adventure such as ours it was important to plan for minimizing some of the risks. Journeying with others increases the possibilities for miscommunication and therefore dangers. Developing and maintaining protocols for good group work was essential.

The German scholar Habermas (1979) suggests that when seeking change within group situations it is crucial to build the right environment conducive to this kind of process. He suggests that in seeking an 'ideal speech situation' there are four fundamental conditions that need to be met. Summarized they are:

- *Understanding*: The receiver can understand what is being communicated.
- *Truth*: The information is accurate and not a fabrication
- *Sincerity*: The communicator is sincere in his or her attempts to communicate and has no hidden agenda.
- *Appropriateness*: The manner, style, and form of communications are appropriate to the people, the setting, and the activity. (summarized from Habermas 1979, pp.2-3)

Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, pp. 106-108) outline extensive criteria for the ethical planning of when working with groups. Winter (1996, p. 24) draws on their work to outline his own list of principles for ethical action research. I have adapted and summarized the issues from both these books that related to our action research and listed them as:

- Establishment and maintenance of group norms and behavior protocols.
- Establishment and maintenance of permission and authorization procedures.
- Commitment to the collaborative process.
- Process negotiation both within and external to the research groups.
- Commitment to documenting and reporting procedures.

- Negotiation procedures for checking on the reportage of opinion.
- Acceptance of group norms and confidentiality protocols.
- Commitment to the process of the research.

So the model of our mode of transport, our vehicle for this journey was identified as action research and our make was participatory and large enough to accommodate groups of artworkers. But I knew that the vehicle needed to be not only roadworthy but also registered. I needed to validate my choice of methodology.

It is the positivist methods of the natural sciences that have influenced people's perceptions of what they see as 'proper' research. 'Positivism denotes the "received view" that has dominated the formal discourse in the physical and social sciences for some 400 years' (Guba & Lincoln 1994, p.108). This view presumes that there is one 'reality', controlled by natural laws and mechanisms, which can be explored by using appropriate research tools (Burns 1994; Fay 1987).

'Whether or not action research is accepted as 'scientific' depends on the way in which *science* is defined. Certainly it is, in one sense, rigorously empirical, insofar as it requires people to define clearly and observe the phenomena under investigation. What is also evident, however, is that action research does not follow the carefully prescribed procedures that have become inscribed as *scientific method*.' (Stringer 1996, p.145)

Within the positivist paradigm the researcher is an outsider who acts as a neutral observer. They control the context of the research in order to prove or disprove these natural laws. In this type of research, validity is achieved through the elimination of bias and therefore the objectivity of the researcher is an issue. In contrast to this, the role of the researcher within a PAR approach could be described as one of active involvement, not detached observation. Decision-making influenced by an egalitarian approach could attempt consensus, rather than a hierarchical decision-making structure and the political natures of the participants and context could be embraced rather than attempting to

maintain a neutral environment. This would be inappropriate in many research projects but could lead to the empowerment of participants within an action research project.

In 'It doesn't count because its subjective! (Re)conceptualizing the qualitative researcher role as 'validity' embraces subjectivity', Smith explores the quandary many researchers are finding themselves in. He writes:

...it is now much clearer to me that a theoretical rationale that recognises the links between perspectivity, morality and utility makes both the concept and the procedures of validity, as derived from an empiricist logic, incompatible with qualitative research. (Smith 2000, p.141)

Whyte states that '[i]n the standard model, the subjects of our studies have little or no opportunity to check facts or to offer alternative explanations' (Whyte 1995, p.536). The cyclic nature of PAR encourages researchers to go through a rigorous process of checking the collected data with those with first hand knowledge, the participants. It could be argued that the active involvement of participants in an ongoing cross-checking process can assure a far higher standard of factual accuracy than can be achieved by standard social reseach methods.

Within many areas of research, replicability is also crucial. Research is seen as valid if it can be repeated. But replicability and responsiveness are hard to achieve in one project. One may suffer when you focus on the other. Conventional research does not set out to achieve responsiveness as it is interested in the results being repeated. Perhaps this quest makes it unsuitable as an agent of change. PAR values responsiveness over replicability, as it is very difficult to achieve action as part of the research if you are not responsive to the changes as they occur. For research to be replicated, the setting would need to be the same. In action research the basic premise is that no two situations are exactly alike so it is unlikely that the research findings will have exactly the same effect (Dick 1997, 1999).

Elliot (1989) suggests other validity criteria when he suggests that in some cases

“...validity rests on their usefulness as projective models for others in exploring their own unique situations.” (Elliot, 1989)

Burns (1994) and Dick (1997) also suggest the use of multiple sources of evidence. This project uses a variety of informants and participants as well as a cyclic process of returning collated data to participants for ratification and prioritization. Dick (1999) also suggests:

...the use of multiple methodologies, multiple sources of information; multiple processes for data collection and analysis; comparing data and interpretations to those from other sources including the literature; and so on. (Dick 1999, p.2)

In *Doing action research in my own organisation: ethical dilemmas, hopes and triumphs* Holian (1999) describes validity based on a 'triangular' combination of aspects of the presented world, the posited world and the researched world. She believes that the feedback loops and cyclic nature of action research allows for informed reflection and analysis from a variety of different 'world' viewpoints. In *Participatory Research: whose roles, whose responsibilities?* Dockery (2000) suggests that validity can be further improved by feeding back the preliminary analysis of responses to those who contributed, enabling them to make further comments or changes and thereby verifying what will be presented as the final analysis.

The validity of this research lies with the usefulness of the process to the arts sector. The participants (including myself) will determine the validity of the findings by what sense they choose to make from the data and analyses. Another test of validity will occur over time when the advocacy process informs greater numbers of artswokers about our process and findings. The participants will receive feedback from the wider context and assess that feedback for its fit with their perception of reality and its usefulness in their context.



summary

The quest for academic appropriateness has taken me through a myriad of methodologies. I was guided toward qualitative research with exploratory and interpretive aims, a critical approach, and emancipatory intent.

This project also needed a methodology, which could:

- cope with diversity
- be appropriate for practitioners
- encourage an active approach
- empower its participants
- act as an agent of change
- recognise group work
- address current deficiencies in arts research by looking at the big picture
- be seen as valid to the academic community and
- be useful to the arts community

This chapter has outlined the finding of the most appropriate vehicle for our research quest. Participatory action research allowed me to pursue this quest into arts and cultural practice within a recognized academic framework. The adaptability of action research is also illustrated within the section outlining different sets of action research cycles. My intrepid venturing into academia led me to a methodology that not only demonstrated appropriate tools but also 'felt right'.

.....*reflection stop*

The vehicle we have chosen is large and more chameleon in nature than just camouflaged in paint but it seems to be beautifully suited to our changing environment. It gives us the flexibility to adapt to changing environment as well as being large enough to cope with groups of participants. Its power source allows for a philosophically driven navigator but also gives a bit of grunt. It should, however still be economical over the long haul.

It is with great anticipation that we set off, feeling like brave pioneers embarking on a new adventure. It is now time to collage the details onto our map, to tell the story, and invite you along for the ride.