
Title	Are you a knowledge maker?
Author(s)	Tan Wee Kiat
Source	<i>SingTeach</i> , 2009(18)
Published by	National Institute of Education (Singapore)

This document may be used for private study or research purpose only. This document or any part of it may not be duplicated and/or distributed without permission of the copyright owner.

The Singapore Copyright Act applies to the use of this document.

Site Search ...

[Home](#)
[About Us](#)
[NIE](#)
[Archives](#)
[Contact Us](#)

Issue 23 - Mar / Apr 2010

Issue 22 - Jan / Feb 2010

Issue 21 - Nov / Dec 2009

Issue 20 - Sep / Oct 2009

Issue 19 - Jul / Aug 2009

Issue 18 - May / Jun 2009

Teacher Ed

Math Ed

Language Ed

Science Ed

Hot Topic

PDF

Issue 17 - Mar / Apr 2009

Issue 16 - Jan / Feb 2009

Issues 1-15

ARE YOU A KNOWLEDGE MAKER?

A knowledge maker is one who makes or creates knowledge. A knowledge user, on the other hand, is one who does not question but simply employs or puts the knowledge into practice. As a teacher, which would you rather be? Read on to find out how you can become a knowledge maker through action research.

Article highlights

How action research benefits teachers

How to start an action research

How to deal with problems that arise

Tan Wah Kiat is a knowledge maker. A former teacher now pursuing his doctoral degree in Queensland, he is a firm believer of teachers doing research. Wah Kiat has had his fair share of ups and downs with action research projects during his years as a teacher.

Based on his experience, Wah Kiat shares with us his motivation for conducting action research and his advice for teachers who are considering embarking on such research.

Q: What is educational action research?

A: Educational action research is a form of self-reflective inquiry undertaken by teachers and/or students within social situations.

Q: What is the purpose of action research?

A: There are three main purposes:

1. To improve the rationality and justice of the teacher's own practices
2. To improve the teacher's understanding of these practices
3. To improve the situations in which the practices are carried out

Educational research is *not* merely a tool to prove the efficiency or effectiveness of particular pedagogy or intervention. It is not about being "right".

It is essentially a framework to think about learning that embodies all the elements of competent practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). These elements include subject matter knowledge, knowledge about the disciplinary foundations of education, human development, classroom organization, pedagogy, assessment, the social and cultural contexts of teaching and learning, and knowledge of teaching as a profession.

Q: Why should teachers embark on such research? What are the benefits both professionally and personally?

A: If we hold fast to the stated objectives above, action research allows the teacher-researchers to explore and question their own and others' interpretations, practice, and ideologies.

This is advantageous to teachers who want to develop their practice by analyzing existing contexts and identifying elements for change. The rigorous process enhances teachers' professional development through the fostering of their capability as professional knowledge makers, rather than simply as professional knowledge users.

All participants involved in the research could also benefit on a personal level because the emancipatory process gives the opportunity for individuals to make genuine change and improvements.

Q: What issues should they consider researching?

A: Presently, the majority of action research projects conducted by teachers in Singapore are focused on improving academic outcomes (Tan et al., in press). I propose a broader understanding of action research with greater focus on issues of equity and social justice.

For example, teachers may consider researching on how they use gendered language in their classrooms. For the triangulation of data, they may audiotape and analyze their own lessons, coupled with personal journal entries of their reflections on the lessons and interviews with the students in the class.

Q: How should teachers initiate or design a quality action research?

A: Identify a problem or issue that is close to the heart. Never create a problem to solve or work backwards with a solution in mind.

Read relevant literature. It is always good to start with some background knowledge of existing research done in the field.

Start small by designing a pilot study and take it as the first cycle of action research. The pilot study may help decide the feasibility of data collection methods and refine the research questions.

It is also important to have a critical friend to always question without offering too much advice. The rationale is really for the teacher-researcher to reflexively verbalize and organize the design of their action research.

Q: What are some potential problems teachers might encounter? What can they do in such situations?

A: Time management is often a major problem for teachers with ever-increasing workloads. It is typical of teachers to complete action research projects with minimum fuss and attention when they view it as an additional burden. Schools should recognize teachers who are engaging in action research and their workload should be negotiated.

Perhaps one of the biggest problems that teachers may face is the fear of telling "unwelcome truths" (Kemmis, 2006). The Ministry and school leaders can help alleviate that fear and allow, or even encourage, and support teacher-researchers to critically examine and question policies and strategies that may seem oppressive.

Q: Tell us about one of your action research projects.

A: I conducted an action research on the gendered practices of PE teachers in my school.

I created a "book of moments" for the PE teachers to record incidents where they felt represented either positive or negative experiences. This was followed by interviews and lesson observations with them.

I embarked on this project because I realized through the literature and reflexivity that my personal practices are gendered, even though I always thought that I was impartial.

Q: What advice do you have for teachers embarking on action research?

A: From my personal experience, don't be upset by failures or lack of cooperation from participants. These are usually wonderful data that helps shape your next cycle of action research.

Also, we have to start believing that "to find bad news is good news" for action research!

References

Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (1999). Relationship of knowledge and practice: Teacher learning in communities. *Review of Research in Education, 24*, 249-306.

Kemmis, S. (2006). Participatory action research and the public sphere. *Educational Action Research, 14* (4), 459-476.

Tan, W. K., Macdonald, D., & Rossi, T. (in press). Educational action research in Singapore: To prove or improve? *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 29*(3).

[BACK TO TOP](#)