



Research Plans

Walk around feeling like a leaf.
Know that you could tumble any second.
Then decide what to do with your time.

Naomi Shihab Nye

It may be true that the best-laid plans often go awry. But without any plan at all, it's unlikely you'll complete your research study. Naomi Shihab Nye's thoughts about time capture our vulnerability in the classroom. Research is a fragile enterprise, easily disrupted by our needs and those of our students. The research plan is a kind of backbone for your study—a skeletal frame on which to hang all your emerging thoughts about your research question, data collection, and how you might sustain your research. When it feels like your research is falling apart, a glance back at your original design can be the glue that holds your work together. A plan, like writer Annie Dillard's schedule, is "a net for catching days."

Teacher-researchers we work with swear by the power of a research brief—a detailed outline completed before the research study begins. In designing a research brief, researchers work their way through a series of questions to develop a plan for their study. The brief often includes these topics, derived through these questions:

Research Brief Guidelines

Research purpose	Why do I want to study this?
Research question	What do I want to study? What subquestions do I have?
Data collection	How will I collect data?
Data analysis	How will I analyze my data?
Time line	When will I complete the different phases of my study?

Support

Who will help me sustain this project?

Permissions

What permissions do I need to collect? Are there ethical issues to consider?

It takes time to develop a strong research plan. Many teachers we've worked with keep a journal or notes for weeks or months, highlighting emerging questions or issues before they begin to draft a research plan. They might test out a data collection strategy or two, tape recording a few discussion groups or taking notes during a science activity to rev up for generating a research brief. We've found summer is often the best time for teachers to develop a full-scale research plan. Teachers can be too immersed in the back-to-school rush in September to think through all the logistics of gathering and analyzing data.

The following research plans by teachers at the elementary, secondary, and college levels show the range of ways you can develop a plan. You might be surprised at how unique each plan is. Even though researchers are working with common headings and steps, their interests and personalities shine through.

Drawing a Fish Tail: Patrice Turner's Research Plan

While the plan is a blueprint for your research, it's important to realize that your plan will change as you begin your research and discover what works and what doesn't. That was exactly the case for Patrice Turner, a kindergarten teacher who studied kindergartners during writing time. Figure 3.1 shows the research brief she wrote in the summer before the school year began.

In October, six weeks into the research process, Patrice took the time to reflect upon her original plan. She discovered that her plan, and her view of herself as a researcher, had changed:

Planning to do research in my kindergarten classroom was exciting and fun, but I found myself getting really nervous as the new school year approached. I have taught for twelve years but have never been a teacher-researcher before. The label scared me at first, but the thought of actually doing research in my room was even scarier. Even though I had my research design, my notebook, and my special pen, I was shaking in my new school shoes!

In the first few weeks I discovered some great surprises and some new beliefs about my research. One wonderful surprise was the excitement that Jeanne, our kindergarten aide, had when she read my research brief. She literally got goose bumps. I was thrilled to have discovered an unexpected research partner.

I had planned to use tape recorders and clipboards to collect data on questions children ask each other during writing time. I didn't really know

PATRICE TURNER'S RESEARCH PLAN

Research Purpose

As a kindergarten teacher, I am intrigued by the process young children go through as they begin to write. I am curious about their needs as writers and what they want to know about beginning writing. I hope that through this research I can discover more of what they need and immediately begin to offer mini-lessons to help satisfy that need, so the children will feel more confident as we work through the process of writing together. I also hope to encourage and model the importance of asking questions to learn from one another.

Research Question

What questions do my kindergartners ask one another during writing time?

Subquestions

- Do certain children ask more questions than others?
- Do certain children get asked more than others?
- Does gender play a part? Do girls or boys ask more questions?
- Are more questions asked directly to another student or open to anyone at the table?
- Do children direct certain questions at some children and other questions at other children?
- Are there children who never ask questions?
- Are any children ignored when asking a question?
- Do children give examples when they answer a question?
- Do the questions change over time?

I have a lot of subquestions (maybe far too many), but I am hoping I can manage them. If I find I can't, I will simply let a question or two go. The data should be very explicit, so I should be able to answer many of my questions by doing a lot of tallying.

Data Collection

- I will tape the children at the writing table once a week for about twenty minutes. Because of the placement of outlets in my room, I will need to keep the tape recorder at one table. I will keep track of the children I tape, and tape a wide range of children. If things go smoothly, I certainly can increase the number of times I tape the children. I plan to do this throughout the school year.
- I will try hard to keep a teacher journal and do some notetaking.

- I may even attempt a little video recording during writing.
- I will survey the children with a brief interview later in the year. I am thinking about January, because we will have had more exposure to writing by then. An example of the survey follows:

Do you ever ask other people at your writing table questions?

What do you ask for help with? or What kinds of questions do you ask? (I need to decide between the two, but I'm leaning toward the second one.)

Who do you ask for help?

Do people ask you questions?

Do you like to ask questions?

Do you like to answer questions?

The last two questions are not a part of my research, but I'm curious. I could make them into yet another subquestion.

- I may try to have an adult/teacher/principal come in to take notes on any questions that the children ask one another during writing time. I wonder, though, whether or not an adult will influence their questioning. Will the children ask the adult more questions than each other?

Possible Codes for Types of Questions

Ideas

Illustrations

Letter formation

Sounds

Punctuation

Capital letters

Spaces

Left to right

Direct/Open

I will need to revisit these after two or three weeks.

Data Analysis

- I plan to listen to the tapes at home where it is quiet and I can focus on listening while relaxing. I have a small room at my house with the computer and a day bed. I have found that I do the majority of my reading and writing for my courses in this room. I feel very comfortable picturing myself listening to the tapes in the evenings. I think this can easily become a ritual without interrupting my school or family life. I plan to listen to the tapes on a weekly basis. I will transcribe the questions asked on the tapes and tally them.
- I plan to read over my teacher journal on the same night I listen to the tape.
- I plan to create a sociogram each quarter. I will focus on who asked questions of whom.

Tentative Time Line

September

- Talk to principal.
- Send permission slips home.
- Explain to kiddos what I'm doing.
- Model asking questions in mini-lessons.
- Discuss with children the importance of asking questions and learning from one another.
- Start taping the very first week (even if they're just drawing at the writing table, it will be considered writing).

Two or Three Weeks into Research

- Revisit list of potential codes.

September-May

- Continue to tape once a week or more, transcribe and analyze the tapes, and cook my teacher journal entries.

Twice a Month

- Meet with my inquiry group at Timberhouse [a local restaurant].

November

- I will share my research process with the parents during conferences.
- I may share my research process at a kindergarten meeting.

January

- I will share my midpoint findings with my inquiry group.

Reflections Before Beginning

I think this is do-able. I feel focused and ready. I'm ready for the learning that will go with this project: the unexpected, the questioning, the thrills, the letdowns (what if they don't ask questions?). I will seek help and encouragement. I am excited about the insight I will gain as I analyze my data. As I discover patterns, I can adapt my teaching to the needs I have discovered.

what to expect at all. I was standing there thinking about what was going to happen, and the kids started right in asking questions as they worked. Jeanne and I each grabbed paper from the recycle box because it was the closest paper. In my excitement I folded my paper crookedly and had no sturdy backing to write on as I recorded my first piece of data: one of my students looking up at me so seriously and asking, "Do you know how to draw a fish tail?"

Jeanne and I were like two buzzing bees. We recorded questions that

the children asked one another and wrote down who was asking whom. I had planned to be so neat, serious, and very professional with my work. Well, that crooked paper worked just fine, and I didn't have time to be really professional about it. It was all in a rush, and I was almost frazzled, but in an exciting way. These emotions just weren't in my original plans.

I discovered, too, that I was not going to make my kids do things just for my research. My kindergarten program comes first, although I hope my research will help me improve my program. With that in mind, I relaxed a little about my informal collecting of data. This made the research more fun for me, and Jeanne and I could get the bigger picture by watching and scripting, instead of using the tape recorder.

Being a teacher-researcher is more enjoyable and less stressful than I thought. I also find that I am more involved in the process than I thought I was going to be. Taking pressure off myself about what I thought I should be has paved the way for a more meaningful experience.

And, by the way, Ronnie and I made an awesome fish tail together!

Patrice had to let go of the formality of her original plan in order to be comfortable in her research. But she was able to gather a surprising amount of data right from the start of the year because she had a clear focus and a research partner as eager as she was to learn from the children.

Patrice also gave herself permission to find her own style and rhythms as a researcher. She knew she was trying on the cloak of teacher-researcher at the start of the year, wondering if it would be as comfortable as those new school shoes. It was a fit because Patrice allowed the research to be a wedding of her questions, her research partner's questions, and the needs of the children. Dewey's (1938) ideas about planning research from decades ago echo in Patrice's work: "The plan, in other words, is a cooperative enterprise, not a dictation. The teacher's suggestion is not a mold for a cast-iron result, but is a starting point to be developed into a plan through contributions from the experience of all engaged in the learning process. The essential point is that the purpose grow and take shape through the process of social intelligence" (72).

Like Patrice, all teacher-researchers work through issues of how their research fits in the classroom and how they will balance their research and teaching responsibilities. Research is a mold with a shifting form—and it is the social relationships in the class that will teach you how your plans need to change.

The Bridge Between Our Strokes and Our Soul: Andie Cunningham's Research Plan

(see Figure 3.2) was a format to help her examine and frame her changes in practice and to make plans to document her process as well as her students:

For me, my work is a combination of my self and my soul, the professional and personal parts of thirty-five years and a lot of gray hair. This project is truly an extension of me into my professional world. As I worked on my research brief, struggling until I reached tears and sobs at my computer, I saw connections that I've been afraid of questioning, pushing back subconsciously for a long time. I want to be fair and hear each individual, and I want my classroom to be a safe place for everyone who enters the door. I have worked consciously for that to be true, and have probably been successful on many levels. But I keep an arm's distance from many of my middle school students. It's been a safety net. I can't do that now if I really want voice and choice in my room, because the voices will be alive in here, and I will need to see, hear, and feel what's going on if all goes right.

Working through the issues of her plan required Andie to work through problems in her teaching. Her reworking involved both changing curriculum and thinking through relationships with students.

Andie's research plan is not a dry, distant recitation like a grocery list, but a melding of mind and heart, intellect and affect. In tandem with the drafting and revising of her research brief, she wrote and revised a poem describing her process:

I reach the island tired,
floppy from my journey of swimming through
hard swells,
the old, the was.
I lay, breathing deep gulps,
feeling the muscle I've gained from the
treacherous trip,
inside
my heart banging as it
sings and wails.

I look into the blue sky,
the bird flies by,
and I watch it soar.
I stay.
Knowing I can.
Voices echo beside me
leaning in to hear, leaning out to learn
we discover the bridge between
our strokes and our souls.

In planning to do research, Andie learned that her actions as a researcher and teacher (her "strokes") are always entwined with who she is as a person (her soul)—what she believes, values, and desires for her students and

Figure 3.2

ANDIE CUNNINGHAM'S RESEARCH PLAN**Purpose**

I want to discover the living impact of student voice and choice in a movement workshop. Similar to Linda Rief and her reading/writing workshops, I want my students to make decisions about their movements in and out of my classes. I also want to discover what my students truly know, and how I can guide them to discover what movements are valuable to them. I am curious to identify pertinent assessment components that I believe we as an industry in physical movement are overlooking. I want to discover a realistic method for documenting student growth in movement other than existing skills testing and fitness testing. Peer and self-assessments coupled with teacher- as well as teacher-and-student-generated scoring guides can be excellent, useful tools, but what more can there be? Will a movement workshop invite students to develop and demonstrate their movement expertise? Will my students feel safe enough to risk beyond their current demonstrated work? Can I become an artist of assessing movement and develop a more effective way to record and interpret the knowledge of physical movement students possess and demonstrate?

Question

What happens when I parallel a movement workshop to a writing/reading workshop?

Subquestions

- What will work and what won't?
- How can I invite students to work at the edge of their confidence?
- What impact will a movement workshop have on my assessment process and ideals?
- What will happen to student learnings and the method of conveying that information?
- Will the students eventually be able to ask their own questions in this process?
- How can I help my students organize strategies without limiting them?
- In what ways can I more effectively invite my students to play?

Current Workshop Design Ideas

- Use both classes in one week for the workshop. Students will have a variety of equipment available for their use. Discuss the one or two teacher-designed questions with students; students will respond to one in drawn or written form. A scoring guide will be used to score the assignment, and will be posted for student viewing. Students and teacher will score student work on the scoring guide.
- In the current twice-a-week forty-five-minute-or-less classes, I can guide for the first fifteen minutes, then have the students explore for the next ten in a self-directed way, and then share for the last ten minutes.

Data Collection and Note Cooking

With my current schedule of having each class twice a week, I will plan a week of movement workshops once a month, with a total of up to eight sessions per trimester. I will continue with my refined notetaking method, including what I see and what they say. Student opinions and suggestions as well as my ideas and educated guesses will continue to impact my scoring guides for written and drawn assessment. I will gather the same three to five students' work from each workshop and note my impressions of content, demonstrated student work, and creativity. I will also compare their response work with their videotaped physical demonstrations and audiotaped interviews. I will attempt to identify patterns in their written/drawn responses that indicate learning, growth, or setbacks. I will experiment with the category chart from my cooked notes to discover impacts on my assessment for classes.

Possible Student-Response Questions for Movement Workshop

When you play, what do you create?
What did you learn when you played?
What did you learn when you worked?
What did our work/play remind you of?
What problems did you discover in your play today?
What is necessary for you to be invited to play?

I will teach a lesson and then ask them for questions. Post the list in class and work/play to discover the answers. Do my kids feel like their attempts make sense and that they are all capable thinkers and movers?

Support

My writing group/teacher research group
Brynna, if I am doing this for an independent study and maybe even if I'm not
Rosemary—I will use her rarely, but would like someone to brainstorm with around the world of assessment
Laurie
Sheila—physical movement teacher in Colorado—maybe
Writing in my "cooked notes"

Audience

Me—to inform my teaching
Physical educators

Books to Explore

Teresa Benzwie. *A moving experience: Dance for lovers of children and the child within.*
Robert Cohan. *The dance workshop: A guide to the fundamentals of movement.*
Naomi Epel. *Writers dreaming.*

Anne Green Gilbert. *Creative dance for all ages.*
 Martha Graham. *Blood memory.*
 Ruth Hubbard. *Workshop of the possible.*
 Langston Hughes. *The book of rhythms.*
 Vera John-Steiner. *Notebooks of the mind.*
 Stephen Nachmanovitch. *Free play.*
 Linda Rief. *Seeking diversity.*
 Gabrielle Roth. *Sweat your prayers.*
 Jennifer Donohue Zakkai. *Dance as a way of knowing.*

English Journal
 National Association of Sport and Physical Education. *Moving into the future.*
 National standards for physical education: A guide to assessment and content.

herself. Her list of books to explore will help to inform her as she adapts her curriculum and the structure of her movement classes.

Not all research briefs include lists of books to read, as Andie's does. For some researchers, this additional reading is integral to the research process. But for others, the main "texts" read in their work will be observations of students and artifacts collected—field notes, audiotapes, and work samples.

Reflections on Reflection: Wally Alexander's Research Plan

Research at the college level involves different constraints and opportunities than research in elementary or secondary classrooms. Professors work with students over a shorter period of time, and there are even more concerns about ensuring that the research be a natural fit with the goals of the course. But at the same time, research at the college level can focus and energize teaching. That was the case with Wally Alexander, as he used his research to question some basic assumptions about the role of reflection in learning (see Figure 3.3).

Wally had a keen sense of the ethical issues inherent in this study. He wanted to enlist his students as co-researchers. At the same time, he realized that young adults who are "adept at playing the game" might feel coerced to participate, or give answers they thought would please him rather than being honest. Because he had a detailed plan, he was able to think through these issues in advance and consider a range of strategies for dealing with his concerns.

Figure 3.3

WALLACE ALEXANDER'S RESEARCH PLAN

Purpose

Self-reflection is critical to the learning process. It is important that we can relate our work to that of others, and that we can connect it to what we did yesterday, and see possibilities as to where it may take us in the future. All of this depends on our ability to step back from our work constantly, look at it carefully, and assess and refine it, gleaning new insights about ourselves as learners in the process. Self-reflection is fundamental to authentic assessment, yet this vital element is largely overlooked in most classrooms.

Considering the important role reflection plays in learning, it seems that development of reflective behaviors should be a goal of our work with undergraduate students aspiring to teach. Becoming more aware of what reflective practices students bring with them and determining what activities promote self-reflection are among my goals for this study.

Assumptions

- These students are reluctant to believe their thoughts will actually be valued. Why? Where did this come from? Issues of trust?
- Different events are paradigm breakers for different people. Gender may be an issue. People jump aboard at different times.

Research Questions

What happens to undergraduate education students when they engage in self-reflection activities that are valued?

Subquestions

- What are their past experiences with self-reflection?
- How do they define self-reflection?
- Are they reluctant to believe that their reflective thoughts will be valued? If so, why?
- Do they see self-reflection as important to learning?
- Can we identify "ah-ha" moments when the value of reflective behaviors becomes self-realized?
- What can we learn from students who value self-reflection and already have self-reflective behaviors?

Data Collection

Survey of baseline data: where are they starting from?

This survey will try to identify reflective behaviors in these students. I'd like to do this at the beginning of week 2. The survey will be completed in class. Compiled results will be shared. Possible survey questions include:

How are you more comfortable with grading? Grading self? Teacher grades? Combination?

Are there people you use as a sounding board? Who?

How do you feel about revising your writing?

Do you ask for feedback on your work?

Do you talk over your plans with others?

Do you discuss schoolwork with classmates or friends?

Do you carry on conversations with yourself about your work?

How do you get good (better) at something?

What does self-reflection mean to you?

When you complete a project, do you think about what went well with it, and/or what you would change if you had it to do over again?

Observational notes of students during "shining moments" activity

This is a very reflective activity that we'll probably do on the second day of class. Observer notes might produce more baseline data (maybe an observer in the back of the room?).

Weekly reflective responses from students

- I'll keep copies.
- Responses will be analyzed for evidence of presence/evolution/valuing of reflective behaviors.
- Responses will be analyzed for evidence of "ah-ha" moments.

Notes from reflective assessment conferences—midterm and final

- Main topics for conferences will be brainstormed with the class.
- Students will be prepared with written notes, which I'll keep or copy.

Reflective free-writes (periodic)

- I'll keep copies for analysis and coding.

My anecdotal notes from observing cooperative teams at work and other activities

- Possibly their notes too, which I'll copy.

Interviews with students who value self-reflection and already have self-reflective behaviors

- Students who appear to have effective self-reflective behaviors will be interviewed to attempt to find out how they got where they are.
- Protocol for interview will be open-ended, aimed at getting *their* story.

Data Analysis

- Compile and code survey results.
- Code anecdotal notes, weekly student reflective responses, and reflective free-writes, looking for trends, evidence of reflective behaviors, and changes in students' perspectives on the value and usefulness of self-reflection

Time Line

Week 2 of Class (mid-September)

- Survey and discussion of project with class.
- Compile survey results.
- Permission/releases.

Late September

- Code notes from "shining moments" and survey results.

October

- Begin analyzing student weekly responses, anecdotal notes, and free-writes.
- Midterm assessment conferences.

November

- Analysis of information from conferences.
- Continue coding weekly responses, anecdotal notes, and free-writes.

December

- Final assessment conference.
- Work on final analysis.

Semester Break

- Write.

Support/Collaboration

- Bimonthly meeting and frequent e-mail with Julie, Patrice, and other members of our newly established, as yet unnamed, teacher research network.
- Connect with XTAR, the teacher research e-mail discussion group.
- Semiregular meetings with Kelly [another college instructor and potential collaborator] to plan, analyze data, and write.

Issues I'm Struggling With

- How and when do I inform the students about this project? I'd like them to know what I'm doing and why, but I don't want them to artificially become self-reflective because that's what I'm looking for. Undergrads are very good at playing the game. This question really has me stumped at the moment. Maybe it isn't a big deal. They'll soon know what I value anyway. Even as I'm writing this, I'm thinking that I need to share my question with them.
- Can I enlist them in notetaking in their cooperative teams?
- When do I get permissions/releases? If I fill them in early, could I ask for blanket releases?
- More work is needed on identification of reflective behaviors.
- What will be the best format for initial survey?
- What in my data is going to show presence/evolution/valuing of reflective behaviors?

Permissions and Ethical Issues

Wally confronted the subtleties of ethical issues right in his research brief. The ethical issues inherent in your study will become apparent when you begin to plan your study and think about getting permission to do your research.

As you make your plans to do research, you will need to think about permissions and notifications. As a rule, we encourage all teachers to get signed permission forms from parents of students involved in their research, or from the students themselves if they are over eighteen years old. Even if your research doesn't involve any data collection or work on the students' part outside of normal classroom expectations, it's still helpful to let parents know what you are studying in the classroom. It also helps give parents a different perspective on what teaching is, and how much of it involves understanding and analyzing students as they work.

Even when you use pseudonyms for your students, there are ethical issues involved in writing about children's actions. Karen Gallas wrestled with this when she wrote about the themes of power and gender in her classroom:

Well, there's always issues when I write about children who are doing things that could be hurtful to other kids. I have to think hard about, "How do I write about these children?"—children who I don't want to present as bad people, because they aren't bad people. The ethical issue for me there is accurately presenting them from a number of dimensions. Their behavior should be seen within the context of their whole way of acting in the world rather than just isolating this one thing and saying "Look at what this child did here!" and assigning it "X, Y, or Z." So, when I'm writing about unpleasant things, I feel it is my obligation to find ways to present children as part of a larger picture.

I have to say, I wonder if this is going to come back at me. Especially with my "bad boy" work. You can imagine the parents who had those little boys. They know who I'm writing about. But what I tried to do was to create a broader picture of both the child and the behavior. So they could see their child in all his glory as well as his . . . struggle. So that's the trick. So far, those parents know their children and they've appreciated those descriptions. (quoted in MacKay 1999)

Karen's words show how complicated a researcher's work is—the task is to show how complex and varied students are yet still find ways to respect everyone in the classroom community. Teacher-researchers live daily with the consequences of their work, and how they represent students, colleagues, and themselves can affect relationships (positively and negatively) for years to come. Developing a permission form is the first step in sorting through these issues of representation, honesty, and respect.

Sometimes, it's clear from the beginning that the research will be

Teacher-researcher Jill Ostrow sent the permission form shown in Figure 3.4 home to the parents of her students. Though your research may be very different, you can adapt this format to meet your needs. For example, if children's confidentiality is important in your research, you could substitute the sentence, "In any reports of this research, a fictitious name will be used to protect your child's privacy."

Any permission form should include the following:

1. A brief explanation of the research project.
2. Request to use student samples or other artifacts in publishing.
3. Explanations of confidentiality.
4. A clear description of how students will not be hurt in any way if they do not participate.
5. A phone number or other forum for parents to discuss the project with you.

Figure 3.5 shows the model form that Stenhouse Publishers sends to its authors to adapt for their student permission forms.

What if a child or parent chooses not to participate? We like the writer Lillian Ross's advice: "Do not write about anyone who does not want to be written about" (Murray 1990b, 47). At the same time, a refusal to participate can be a red flag—it may signify other concerns the parent has about your classroom and teaching that are worth exploring before misunderstandings escalate.

We also encourage you to share your research plans with administrators in your school and district. Rarely is an administrator anything but enthusiastic about a teacher's willingness to tackle a new project. But again, concerns can point to potential future conflicts if they aren't resolved in the planning phase of your work.

The two statements of ethics shown in Figure 3.6 can be helpful guides in thinking about the ethical issues of your research. The National Writing Project will also provide readers with the *Guide to Ethical Issues in Teacher Research*.

Planning and Pleasure

The research plan can give you lots of insight and joy if you accept it for what it is—a starting point for your work, not a rigid summary of what must be done when. Research is a cyclical, not a linear, process. Throughout your research, you'll want to circle back to your original plans, revising, extending, and abandoning parts of the plan that don't represent the actual work of your research. Researchers are sometimes discouraged in their work when they don't see the plan as something that can be altered, as

Figure 3.4 Permission Form

Dear Parents,

In my math curriculum, the children are surrounded with mathematical concepts constantly. These concepts will be integrated into language, science, geography, and history through problems that I and the children create. This year, I will be looking closely at the variety of strategies the children use not only for solving problems but for explaining problems they have solved. These strategies include drawing, pictures, manipulatives, and symbols.

I especially want to look at the thinking processes of the children as they solve problems and explain in writing and orally how a problem was solved. Through these written stories of their thinking processes, I hope to be better able to understand how they internalize concepts and how they begin to transfer that knowledge to more complex thinking strategies. I'll be interviewing the children about their processes as part of my teaching, as I always do. Occasionally this year, I'll also be audiotaping these interviews and conversations. When the whole class shares their math problems and thinking strategies or gives oral presentations, these conversations may also be recorded on occasion. The purpose of these recordings will be to give me a chance to examine the children's comments more closely and repeatedly in order to catch things I might miss if I only heard them once.

I'll also be making copies of some of the writing, drawing, and problem solving the kids have done, with their permission. I know the class will benefit from the better understanding we will have of the children's mathematical understandings.

I would appreciate your permission to include copies of your child's written work and art work in the articles or chapters I may write for publication. I am planning to use your child's real name in my writing, since all examples I use will be a celebration of what children *can* do. I have spoken with the children and that is what they prefer. (However, if you would prefer that I use a fictitious name to protect your child's privacy, please write your name choice here: _____.)

If you are willing to grant permission for me to use copies of your child's work from our classroom in written reports for publication, please sign the permission form at the bottom of the page and return it to me as soon as possible.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jill Ostrow

Child's Name

Parent or Guardian

Date

Dear

I am . . . (add concise but specific description of what it is you are writing, e.g., "working on my Master's thesis and also writing an associated article which I hope will form a chapter in a professional book for teachers" or "starting to write a book for other teachers on teaching first grade, based on the work we do in my classroom here at . . . school.")

The project is in the early stages of development, and one of the things I am doing is collecting samples of children's work for possible inclusion in the (thesis/article/book). From time to time I may also be taking photographs of the children.

At this point I don't know exactly what I will and won't be able to include, but I would very much appreciate having your permission to reproduce your child's writing, drawing, or photograph in the publication. Would you please sign both copies of this form and return one to me, keeping the other for your files.

If you would like to discuss this further, please call me at school any morning/afternoon between _____ and _____.

Your name:

I grant permission for the use of the material as described above.

Child's name:

Parent or guardian's signature:

Name and address:

Date:

a team of teachers completing a long-term study in Georgia discovered: "Probably our most serious mistake as novice teacher-researchers was to commit ourselves to a two-year research design before we had any experience at research. We stuck doggedly to the two-year design even when it wasn't working because we thought we had to. We didn't realize that a written design is seldom the lived design of classroom research. More experienced teacher-researchers might have cautioned us to be prepared to adjust our plan, to speed it up, slow it down, change its emphasis, or abandon it midstream" (Keffer et al. 1998, 30).

The time you spend planning your inquiry should be some of the most enjoyable time you spend as researcher, especially if you realize that your final research project may end up looking very different than you had

Figure 3.6 Ethics Statements

Statement of Ethics

The Teacher Research Special Interest Group
American Educational Research Association
Drafted by Marian M. Mohr

1. *The Teacher-Researcher Role:* Teacher-researchers are teachers first. They respect those with whom they work, openly sharing information about their research. While they seek knowledge, they also nurture the well-being of others, both students and professional colleagues.
2. *Research Plans:* Teacher-researchers consult with teaching colleagues and appropriate supervisors to review the plans for their studies. They explain their research questions and methods of data collection and update their plans as the research progresses.
3. *Data Collection:* Teacher-researchers use data from observations, discussions, interviewing, and writing that is collected during the normal process of teaching and learning. They secure the principal's permission for broader surveys or letters to solicit data. They also secure permission to use data already gathered by the school to which they would ordinarily have access as part of their teaching responsibilities (such as standardized tests) or for school information that is not related to their assigned responsibilities (such as protected student records).
4. *Research Results:* Teacher-researchers may present the results of their research to colleagues in their school districts and at other professional meetings. When they plan to share their conclusions and findings in presentations outside the school or district, they consult with the appropriate supervisors. They are honest in their conclusions and sensitive to the effects of their research findings on others.
5. *Publication:* Teacher-researchers may publish their reports. Before publishing, teacher-researchers obtain written releases from the individuals involved in the research, both teachers and students, and parental permission for students eighteen or younger. The confidentiality of the people involved in the research is protected.

Ethical Responsibilities of Researchers

Clayton Action Research Collaborative
Clayton, Missouri

Participating in a research project requires that some attention be paid to the ethical responsibilities of researchers. We have adapted the following five rules that Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) recommend:

1. Establish whom you need to get permissions from.
2. Be clear and straightforward in articulating the nature and scope of the research.
3. Anticipate potentially sensitive areas or issues the research may focus upon.
4. Be sensitive to the hierarchy of the school or district.
5. Be aware that the aims and objectives of action research are to make changes. Recommendations for practice in a particular direction may challenge colleagues.

Before you begin to collect data, think through how you intend to make use of the data. If you intend to quote sources by name, the sources should know this in advance of participating in the project, and permission to do so should be obtained in advance of any data collection. Share your plans for shielding identities and maintaining confidentiality with those you might use as sources of data collection.

Action research is aimed ultimately at helping students. You would never want to do anything as a researcher that would impede or jeopardize that process.

originally envisioned. In the busyness that is everyday life for teachers, we rarely give ourselves the gift of stepping back and creating a larger portrait of what we know and what we want to learn more about. In talking about teacher research, Deborah Meier notes the power of enjoying those moments of insight: "This is the sustainable thing: the pleasure we can take from the imperfect instrument that we've created, and the imperfect kids we have, and our imperfect selves. If we're only looking at ourselves as something that we're going to like later on, then we're not going to like who we are now, either. I think there's a lot of that happening now. We're under such pressure to produce results—outcomes—we don't allow ourselves a lot of enjoyment in the here and now" (Meier quoted in Campbell 1997a, 23).

The research plan is a snapshot of the here and now of you as a researcher—what you care enough about to study, what strategies you've developed to answer your questions, who the colleagues are that can sustain your growth as a researcher. Take time to enjoy the researcher you are now, and use your research plans to chart the researcher you hope to be one day.

RESEARCH WORKSHOP



Hanging Around

Brenda Miller Power

There are many variations on the "hanging around" activity, which is a terrific way to help novice researchers go through all the phases of research design and implementation in a short period of time. More important, it exposes researchers to the concept of understanding others through understanding their cultures. Any place people meet and interact is a potential research site, as Mary Catherine Bateson (1994) writes, "Participant observation is more than a research methodology. It is a way of being, specially suited to a world of change. A society of many traditions and cultures can be a school of life" (27).

This activity will get you started as a researcher in that "school of life." You will need:

- One or two research partners.
- A good people-watching spot at a mall, a restaurant, or a retail store.

Begin at your school or at a central meeting spot before you go to the "hanging around" site. After you've identified where you want to do your research, answer these questions individually (from Kirby and Kuykendall 1991):

- Considering what you know about this place, product, or service, what do you expect to find?
- How do you expect the place to be organized?
- What type of clients/customers would you expect? Would one age group or gender predominate? Would you expect a certain income or educational level to dominate?

You and your partners then compare notes, highlighting differences in expectations. You then go to watch people in the location of your choice. Your goal is to describe fully the scene, events, actors, and interactions.

On site, start with the basic components of understanding the site by answering more of Kirby and Kuykendall's questions:

- How many cars are in the parking lot?
- What are the "arrival behaviors" of the customers? (Do they pause to look in the window, or rush in; do they speak to other people—what greetings do they use; do they ask for information, and so on.)
- Note the number of customers arriving alone and the size of groups. Keep a running tally of customers by age group, gender, and ethnicity.
- If possible, talk to one customer who doesn't seem to be in a hurry. What brings the customer there? How often? What do they think of the place? Ask similar questions of an employee about the clientele of the place.

Set aside at least fifteen minutes to write down random observations of the site. Ask yourself these questions as you take notes:

- Who's in charge? How is power gained or lost as the actors interact?
- Who controls conversations? What are the topics of conversation?
- What are the key elements in the scene?
- What are the relationships of the actors?
- What language or actions seem culture- and scene-specific?
- What ethical concerns arise from the assignment?

You and your partners should take notes separately and then compare them. This activity should be repeated the following week, with at least a couple of hours set aside for discussion of notes. Your final collective

analysis should describe the scene, events, actors, and interactions fully in any form—narrative, poem, fiction, role play. You should also include a detailed map of the scene. It's best to do this activity with groups of researchers going to different sites. You can then share your findings at a final meeting and discuss how what you've learned transfers to your classroom research planning.

We have done this activity many times with students and colleagues, and we are amazed at the range of research design issues that emerge as people work in teams to understand a place outside of school.

For example, one group decided to hang around at McDonald's. They were surprised at the differences in the behaviors of customers who seemed to be "regulars" and those who seemed to be making a quick stop for food. Their final write-up of their research was a poem, describing with spare, clean phrases the routines and rituals. They used the hanging around experience to think more about the rules and routines in their classrooms—and what role they played in establishing these routines.

Another group spent time at a large chain bookstore/coffeehouse. They catalogued all the differences in cultures present, from the youths with pierced noses to the dapper retired professors in tweeds. These researchers learned the importance of noting the most telling details to describe members of different social groups, knowledge they would use to explore the more subtle differences between students in their classrooms.

The team of researchers who observed customers at the local Department of Motor Vehicles found it was essential to include the snippets of conversations, both from the waiting line and between clerks and customers. Their observations led them to include more tape recording and transcriptions in their research studies, because they saw that research informants come to life on the page when their lives are presented in their own words.

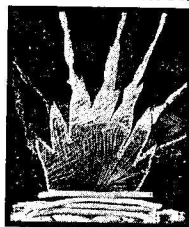
A trio who observed at a local restaurant found that sketches of where customers sat and how space was used by customers were most helpful in understanding their site. They decided to collect more visual information in their research project, including photographs and daily charts of where children choose to sit and who they choose to work with.

As you have insights about what you're seeing, keep returning to your research plan. How does this change the way you'll want to collect data? What is most helpful to you in understanding this site with others, and how can that understanding inform the way you analyze your data? How do your teammates support you? When do they get in the way of your work? How can you use this knowledge to find the research partners who will be able to help with your classroom project?

We've had findings presented as poems, songs, want ads, original art, plays, pantomime, and narratives. The final presentations may be the most important part of the activity. Researchers see that they can take a small amount of data and still have insights about how people interact and cultures form.

RESEARCH

WORKSHOP



Testing the Water with Mini-Inquiry Projects

Jerome C. Harste and Christine Leland

Engaging teachers and undergraduate interns in mini-inquiry projects is an effective way to encourage classroom-based research. Mini-inquiry projects are just that: quick investigations of issues that get raised through professional reading, conversations, or occurrences in classrooms. Some of the questions and comments that led to mini-inquiry projects and were subsequently investigated by teachers and interns at the Center for Inquiry in Indianapolis follow:

"I think *The Witch's Broom* is too hard a book for first graders."

"I don't think children can correct their own spelling errors; if they could, they wouldn't make them in the first place."

"I think kids like books that are concrete (about things they have had experience with) rather than abstract (fantasy)."

"Are manipulatives as important for older kids as they are for the younger ones?"

"Instead of focusing on the elements of literature—characters, setting, events, main ideas—as we talk about books, will an open conversation lead to coverage of these same topics?"

"If I get Terrance to talk about the successful strategies he uses when reading, will this make him a better and more confident reader?"

Each of these musings has been the basis for a mini-inquiry project at our school. While questions might provide the most direct route into the inquiry process, statements that are shared in collaborative settings become inquiries when speaker is asked, "How do you know that?" In our combined group of teachers and interns, for example, it was one of the interns who originally commented that *The Witch's Broom* was too hard a book for first graders. Others in the group immediately asked, "How do you know that?" and "How can we find out if that's true?"

The formulation of questions leads to hypotheses and plans for gathering classroom data that will test them. More often than not, these plans are generated through collaborative discussions. In our case, teachers and interns worked together to figure out the best ways to collect appropriate data for the various mini-inquiries that members of the collaborative were interested in pursuing. With concrete plans in mind, teachers and interns now saw their classrooms as places for doing research as they went about their teaching. They agreed to gather data for a specified period of time (a week, in this case) and to come together again to discuss, interpret, and analyze what they had found.

Sometimes the discussion with others led participants to revise their plans for data collection or to conclude that they had not collected enough data. In addition, we frequently found that new questions were generated

before the original ones had been answered, causing inquiries to take sharp turns in new directions. In most cases, the final result was a one- or two-page write-up that was shared with the whole group.

Mini-inquiry projects, we believe, have done more to establish an attitude of inquiry among our community of teachers, undergraduate interns, and university faculty than anything else we have tried. While we also engaged in some larger inquiry projects like a "sense of place" study that focused on Indianapolis, we found that these required significant investment in terms of time, travel, trips to the library, finding people to interview, and so on. Although these projects were beneficial in many ways, we all felt that the mini-inquiries provided easier access to a greater variety of explorations into various aspects of teaching.

We see mini-inquiry projects as a low-stress way to start messing around with inquiry. Their inherent simplicity helps to ensure that inquiry is seen as a way of life rather than as a big deal.

Philosophically, education-as-inquiry is meant to suggest that the whole of education is inquiry—everything from building curriculum according to the personal and social interests of children to seeing teaching as inquiry and ourselves as teacher-researchers. When paired with opportunities for systematic collaboration, mini-inquiries can be powerful curricular invitations that do much to support us all in becoming more reflective practitioners.

We also think that there is something to be said for the idea of venturing slowly into unknown territory. New Englanders, for example, know that the idyllic beauty of their rocky coast needs to be juxtaposed with knowledge of the frigid ocean water that can literally take one's breath away if approached without due restraint. Visitors who wish to swim there soon learn that there is less of a shock when they test the water with their toes and wade in gradually. We think there's an analogy here to teacher research. Mini-inquiries help us test the water before plunging into something that might otherwise be pretty scary. Doing teacher research (like swimming in cold water) doesn't have to leave us breathless if we start small. We might even be surprised to find that once we're used to it, the new perspective is quite refreshing.

featured **TEACHER**



RESEARCHER

Research Design

Michelle Schardt
Elementary Bilingual Teacher

Research Purpose

Bilingual education was developed after so many language minorities were found to be failing in regular education programs. By teaching subject matter and literacy in the first language while the student is acquiring English, he or she can be more successful. Two-way bilingual education programs developed when schools realized they could use the language minority population to help English-only speakers acquire a second language, too. This is the type of program I have been involved in for five years at various schools in California and Oregon, with Spanish and English being the languages. One aspect of all the programs that has bothered me is the English-only students' lack of Spanish proficiency. As we try to "sell" these programs to parents, I am feeling more and more dishonest saying that our goal is for all the children to be bilingual. It seems the focus is still on the language minority children. While we are having a lot of success in this area, we have to put more energy into the Spanish language development. My research will see if I can do just that.

Research Question

In my two-way bilingual class, what happens to Spanish language usage by my "English experts" when they have focused Spanish lessons for English-only speakers (without "Spanish experts")?

Subquestions

- Will English experts play/work with Spanish speakers more frequently?
- How will the English speakers use their acquired language?
- Will they enjoy Spanish more?
- Will they take more risks?
- Will they ask Spanish experts for help?

Data Collection

- Starting at the beginning of the year, three times a week I will take running notes during "Big Workshop" (free-choice time), recording which children choose to work together. I will make record sheets with each area of the classroom and fill in names to make it easier.
- I'll code the language users with S or E. I'm sure a few students

would want to take over this job soon after I begin. I will also record what subject is being discussed.

- During different group work times (patterning, free exploration, journals) in which students choose whom they work with or sit by, I will take photographs. Later I can show the students the pictures and ask them why they chose to work with that person. I think it will be interesting to have the students be a direct part of the observation.
- With a tape recorder, I will bug the playhouse, reading corner, and math center once a week to capture which languages are being used and which books are being chosen.
- I will initiate a dialogue with the parents in our interactive homework journal to see how the children's attitudes about Spanish change over the year.
- I will do surveys with all my English experts at the beginning and end of the school year. Possible questions:

How do you feel on Spanish days?

Do you understand Spanish?

Do you want to learn Spanish?

Do you like Spanish?

How much Spanish do you know? A little, a lot, or a medium amount?

Data Analysis

I will look through my notes once a month and count up the interactions lasting more than ten minutes with a Spanish expert and an English expert. I will ratio that with what language was used (for example, out of twenty-five encounters, nine were in Spanish in September).

The photographs will provide a visual record of the children and the partners or groups they are choosing to work with. They will also be good springboards for conversations among the students involved about why they are choosing to work with the people the pictures show them working with. I will record our interviews the week I do them instead of bugging the room, and then transcribe when I do the regular tapes. Once a week in my morning prep, when it's nice and quiet, I will transcribe the tapes I collect with my kindergarten partner for the next year. She will be collecting tapes, too. This will tell me what the kids are actually saying (if anything!) in the target language. I will be able to hear what they are getting out of their Spanish language instruction.

The dialogue journals will provide me with individual accounts regarding the attitudes of the students. I'll put copies of pertinent information in their files to follow the phases of their feelings toward Spanish. At the end of the year, I'll use these as well as the surveys to analyze how attitudes have

been affected. I will triangulate the findings from the different forms of data and see if they are congruent. I will report the results in narrative form as an overall evaluation. I will share this information with students and parents.

When discussing language, I will use a code system to record what type of language is used. A possible system might be

D: directing, telling what to do

H: asking for help

VH: help on vocabulary

WH: help on work being done

L: labeling, naming objects, colors, numbers, etc.

S: social

Support/Collaboration

I plan to do this project with the other kindergarten teacher who will be teaching the English language development part of the program. We will be pooling our kids and planning our lessons together, so it will be natural for her to follow along with the research with her English experts. Heather will be professional and motivating, even though she is new at all this. I also plan to use a group of teachers I've met through my course work and with whom I'm in a new writing group. They will question me about my research every time we meet! I want them to expect to read the transcripts and the results of my surveys. Maybe I'll pick one to really watch me and my progress!

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Research Design

Joseph Kelley
Fifth-Grade Science Teacher

Purpose

This year I am using portfolios as a means of assessment in the science program. As part of each lesson, students will reflect on what they have learned. Students will decide what papers will be included in their portfolios along with a statement as to why the papers were chosen and what this shows about them as learners. They will also set goals for the next unit. I want to see how students perceive themselves as learners.

Questions

What happens when students use self-reflection in science as a means of assessing growth?

Subquestions

How are my teaching practices affected by student growth?

Is there a change in the students' attitude when they review their growth?

What growth did students have in their knowledge base?

What new skills do students have and how are they used?

How does student writing change?

Are students setting realistic goals? How do they perceive themselves accomplishing those goals?

Method

I will be working with two groups in science three times a week. Students start each unit by webbing their knowledge and developing a list of questions they would like answered. In cooperative learning groups, students complete science experiments and lab reports that encourage them to make predictions, develop a hypothesis, analyze, observe, compare, order, and infer.

At the completion of each lab, students will reflect on what they have learned, what role they had in the experiment, and questions they may still have. At the same time, I will do notetaking on what I see individual students doing. I will compare my observations with student reflections once a week with each class.

Students will develop portfolios that will be passed in at the end of the second, third, and fourth quarters. I will analyze self-reflection in the portfolios and compare with the weekly observation notes I've made.

Data Collection

- Student responses
- Videotapes
- Photos
- Conference notes
- Artwork
- Graphs and charts

Calendar

August

- Letter to parents
- Develop survey questions
- Start teacher journal

September–January

- Notetaking
- Keep teacher journal
- Student folders
- Model self-reflection
- Survey records kept in teacher log
- Review student responses weekly
- Make and review one student videotape weekly
- Talk with co-teacher to share information
- Parent partner to make observations and meet weekly to discuss and see if there are any connections at home
- Look for patterns

February–April

- Analyze student growth in portfolios
- Continue all of the above

June

- Draw conclusions from portfolios
- Complete a final survey
- Review entry and exit survey /compare differences
- Summary statement



Research Brief

Sharon Frye

Middle School Social Studies/Language Arts Teacher

Origins of the Question

About two months ago, I brought my three-year-old daughter to my seventh-grade class for part of the day. When I asked for volunteers to read to her during reading time, I was surprised to discover that nearly half the class wanted to read picture books to her. The students were a mix of good and struggling readers. A little while later, I brought in *The Stinky Cheese Man* (Scieszka 1992) and I asked if anyone would like to read it. Again, nearly half the class wanted to read the book. I gave it to one struggling reader, who looked at it, passed it on to another student, then picked up another picture book that had been on our bookshelf all year. No one had picked up any of the picture books before this; it was as if I had given them permission to consider picture books as valid reading material. This experience got me wondering how picture books could fit into our reading and writing program and what benefits reading picture books might have on students' self-confidence as readers and writers.

Questions

How do picture books fit into our reading and writing program?

What happens to students' reading and writing skills when they are exploring literacy through picture books?

Do students' perceptions of their skills change when they are reading and writing picture books in middle school?

What We Will Be Trying

Individually and as a whole class, we will read picture books to discuss the terms the authors used in creating their books. We will also write and illustrate our own picture books. Students will choose their topic, the audience they will target, and the mode of writing they will use. When they are finished, we will read our books to authentic audiences in the target age ranges.

Data Collection

- Journals: Students will keep journals to reflect on what they are learning. I will read and respond to these journal entries.
- Writers' surveys: Students will complete writers' surveys before the project begins and again at the end of the project. The surveys will ask students to reflect on their own skills and perceptions as writers.

- Observations/field notes: I will take field notes daily to track engagement in the project, enthusiasm level for students, and progress I may observe. I will also keep a daily journal to record my observations.
- Interviews: I may choose to interview a few students individually. I will choose students of differing ability levels to see how they respond to the project.
- Writing samples: I will compare writing samples from this project with writing samples from earlier in the year to determine growth.

Reflection/Analysis

- I will review my journal entries weekly, the students' journal entries, and my field notes to reflect and note any observations I make.
- I will read the initial writers' surveys within the first week and write a journal reflection recording insights and observations I note.
- I will meet every other week with a support group to discuss what I have noticed.
- After three weeks I will review the data I have collected to determine if I need to conduct individual interviews.
- Once the project is complete (I anticipate it will take three to four weeks) I will compare writing samples and writers' surveys to determine what changes have occurred.

Reference

Scieszka, J. 1992. *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*. New York: Viking.

featured **TEACHER**



RESEARCHER

Research Brief

Susan Pidhurney
Reading Recovery Teacher

Purpose/Audience

Last year was my training year for Reading Recovery. A huge component of this program for students is nightly rereading of a familiar story and the re-assembly of a cut-up sentence. The homework takes no more than ten or fifteen minutes. Of the six students I worked with, only one parent did the homework on a semiregular basis. Despite notes and phone calls, I had very little success improving this area. I am interested in finding out if regular contact through journals will facilitate home involvement with my students. My primary interest is to see how increased parent involvement affects these students. Hopefully this will help other Reading Recovery teachers in their interactions with families.

Research Question

What happens when I begin to use take-home journals with my Reading Recovery students?

Subquestions

How will it affect home/school connections?

Does it matter who responds? (Mom, Dad, other adult)

Is attendance related to regular journal use?

If families aren't responding, what reasons are they giving?

How are students' attitudes reflected in parents' journal entries?

How are parents' attitudes reflected in students' behavior/attitudes?

Data Collection

1. Journals
2. Field notes
 - a. observations
 - b. phone calls
 - c. running records
 - d. book graphs

Data Analysis

1. Go through the journals looking for
 - a. Is there a response?
 - b. Who is responding?
 - c. What categories of response are emerging?
 - (i) positive comments
 - (ii) negative comments
 - (iii) questions
2. Check attendance records
3. Check in-class anecdotal notes for any patterns

Time Line

1. First ten lessons ("roaming in the known") for two weeks:
 - a. Initiate contacts with home
 - b. Open House
 - c. Take photo for cover
 - d. Talk with child about journal
2. Beginning with Week 3:

- a. Send home familiar text and cut-up sentence with the journal in a bag each night
- b. Respond as often as home person responds
- c. If no response, date and put "no response," then write my entry
3. Every two weeks:
 - a. Look at responses and see what categories are developing
 - b. Analyze data and make revisions accordingly
4. At the end of the child's program, take exit survey questionnaires/parent comments and look for categories

Support

1. Other Reading Recovery teachers
2. Classroom teachers of my Reading Recovery students
3. Families

Permissions

1. Let my principal know what I intend to do. (Since parent participation has been an issue, I am sure he will be supportive of anything that will help.)
2. Send home standard Reading Recovery permission slip to selected students.
3. I will request permission to use examples from the journals in the event I write an article (with assurances of the anonymity of the writer). Any material I want to use will be given to the writer as well, and I will make clear that the intent is to share information with other parents and Reading Recovery teachers.

Ideas for Prompts to Keep Dialogue Moving

1. Tell about myself/family (to model an entry). "Tell me about your child."
2. "What do you remember about school?" (good/bad)
3. "What are your goals for school this year?"
4. "What would you like me to know that will help me be successful with your child?"
5. "What does your family like to do for fun?"