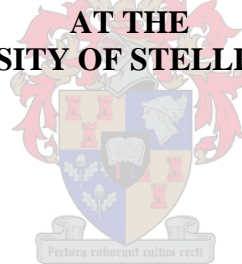


**AN ACTION RESEARCH INQUIRY INTO OUTCOMES-BASED
EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN AN ADULT LEARNING ENVIRONMENT
AT THE FORENSIC SCIENCE LABORATORY**

JASON NAIDOO

**THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY
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UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH**



SUPERVISOR: PROF. C.A. KAPP

DECEMBER 2006

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any university for a degree.

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Signature

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Date



SUMMARY

The Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) is a component of the South African Police Service (SAPS). The Questioned Document Unit (QDU) is a section within the FSL.

It has been practice in the QDU to recruit members of the SAPS for training as Questioned Document Examiners within the FSL. Although the SAPS has a policy on education, training and development, it is not applied. Even after the establishment of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), the QDU and the rest of the FSL continued their training practices at the workplace outside the outcomes-based paradigm.

As part of standard practice, the FSL has taken content experts (forensic analysts) and turned them into trainers. These forensic experts had no training qualifications and little or no facilitation skills. Their knowledge of outcomes-based education (OBE) and adult learning was also either inadequate or non-existent. This shortcoming has influenced the quality of learning in this environment. In 2004 the Forensic Science Laboratory began to give some members an opportunity to be trained as trainers, assessors and moderators of learning. However, this has been a disjointed effort. Generally, learners have had to endure a frustrating period of more than four years of internal training before being certified as competent to act as examiners.

Before 1994 the QDU employed mostly white personnel as examiners. Most black personnel still occupy the lower salary levels amongst examiners. There are no black trainers. At present (2006) in the FSL, the tendency is that white personnel hold senior positions and black personnel are juniors. There is covert racial tension among the members.

In the QDU, the training manager has always been a trainer as well. In the training environment at the QDU there have been obvious problems, namely –

- poor practice of OBE and adult learning;
- relationship problems between trainer and learners;
- distrust and a lack of communication and dialogue between trainer and learners; and
- underlying racial tension.

The action research process on which we (the learners, training manager and I) embarked was aimed at –

- opening dialogue/communication between the training manager and learners;
- increasing learner participation in the process; and
- providing the opportunity for both the learners and the training manager to increase their knowledge of adult learning and OBE.

We hoped that by making the entire action research process transparent we could create a platform for the learners and the training manager to build relationships in order to bring about an improvement in learning practice.

We used an action research process that included participation by both the learners and the training manager. Change occurs within the action component of the action research process, while the research component is meant to generate knowledge. We used a **cyclic method** that entailed stages of planning, action, observation and reflection. Continuity was achieved by the reflection stage of one cycle informing the planning stage of the next.

The action research process used in this setting has supported the existing theory and assumptions that adult learners want to participate, be involved in decision-making, and learn by doing. It has also shown that they are critically aware.

The learning practice at the QDU has improved. The action research process that took place at the unit can serve as a powerful case study for trainers who endeavour to improve practice in other environments.



OPSOMMING

Die Forensiesewetenskapslaboratorium (FWL) is 'n komponent van die Suid-Afrikaanse Polisie (SAPD), terwyl die Betwistedokumente-Eenheid (BDE) 'n afdeling binne die FWL is.

Sedert die stigting van die BDE was dit algemene praktyk om lede van die SAPD te werf en hulle binne die FWL as eksaminatore van die BDE op te lei. Alhoewel die SAPD 'n beleid het ten opsigte van onderwys, opleiding en ontwikkeling, word dit nie toegepas nie. Selfs ná die totstandkoming van die Suid-Afrikaanse Kwalifikasieowerheid (SAKO) en die Nasionale Kwalifikasieraamwerk (NKR), het die BDE en die res van die FWL hul werkgebaseerde opleidingspraktyke buite die paradigma van uitkomsgebaseerde onderwys voortgesit.

Die FWL het tot dusver forensiese skeikundiges in opleiers omskep. Hulle het geen kwalifikasies in opleiding gehad nie en hul kennis van uitkomsgebaseerde onderwys (UGO) en volwasseneleer, asook hulle fasiliteeringsvaardighede, was onvoldoende. In sommige gevalle het dit geheel en al ontbreek. Hierdie tekortkoming het 'n nadelige invloed op die gehalte van leer gehad. Onlangs (2004) het die FWL begin om sommige polisielede die geleentheid te bied om as opleiers, assessors en moderators van leer opgelei te word, maar hierdie pogings is nog nooit behoorlik gestruktureer nie. Binne die huidige opset is daar leerders wat meer as vier jaar interne opleiding moes ondergaan voor hulle as bevoeg gesertifiseer is om as opleiers op te tree.

Die BDE het in die verlede meesal wit personeel in diens geneem as eksaminatore. Die meeste van die swart eksaminatore in die BDE is op die laer salarisvlakke, en daar is geen swart opleiers nie. Tans (2006) is daar hoofsaaklik wit personeel in die seniorposte in die FWL, met die swart personeel meesal in juniorposte. Daar is onderliggende rassspanning onder die lede.

In die BDE was die opleidingsbestuurder nog altyd ook 'n opleier. Die volgende probleme is in die opleidingsomgewing van die BDE geïdentifiseer:

- swak praktyk t.o.v. UGO en volwasseneleer;
- troebel verhoudings tussen die opleier en die leerders;
- wantroue en gebrekkige kommunikasie en dialoog tussen die opleier en die leerders; en
- onderliggende rass spanning.

Die aksienavorsingsproses wat ons (ek, die leerders en die opleidingsbestuurder) aangepak het was daarop gemik om –

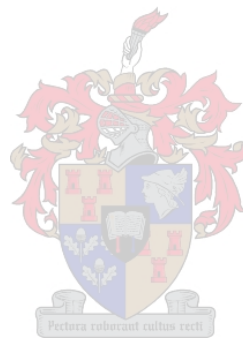
- dialoog/kommunikasie tussen die opleidingsbestuurder en die leerders te vestig;
- leerderdeelname in die proses te verhoog; en
- vir beide die leerders en die opleidingsbestuurder die geleentheid te bied om hul kennis van volwasseneleer en UGO uit te brei.

Deur die hele aksienavorsingsproses deursigtig te maak, het ons gehoop om vir alle rolspelers 'n geleentheid te skep om verhoudinge te bou ten einde 'n verbetering in die leerpraktyk teweeg te bring.

'n Aksienavorsingsproses is aangewend wat deelname deur beide die leerders en die opleidingsbestuurder ingesluit het. In aksienavorsing vind verandering binne die aksiekomponent van die proses plaas, terwyl die navorsingskomponent daarop gemik is om kennis vir die deelnemers – en as deel van die proses self – te genereer. Ons het 'n **sikliese metode** gebruik wat beplanning, handeling, waarneming en refleksie behels het. Kontinuiteit is verseker deurdat die refleksiestadium van een siklus die basis gelê het vir die beplanningstadium van die volgende.

Die aksienavorsingsproses wat in hierdie opset gebruik is, het die bestaande teorie en aannames ondersteun dat volwasse leerders wil deelneem, dat hulle by besluitneming betrokke wil wees, dat hulle wil leer deur te doen, en dat daar 'n groter kritiese bewussyn is.

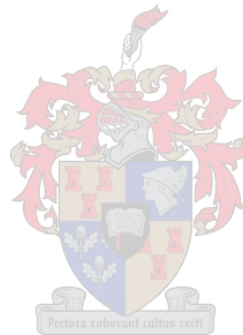
Die leerpraktyk aan die BDE het verbeter. Die aksienavorsingsproses aan die BDE kan 'n betekenisvolle gevallestudie wees vir diegene wat poog om hul praktyk in ander omgewings te verbeter.



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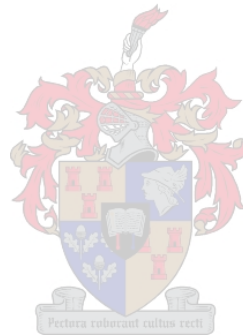
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CHAPTER 1

SETTING THE SCENE

In this chapter I lay the foundation for the rest of the thesis. I provide details regarding my place of birth and the schools and university I attended. I then discuss my experiences and perceptions regarding learning and round off the chapter by discussing my personal values and how they influence my study. Lastly, I give some insight into my choice of action research.

1.1 BACKGROUND: MY STARTING POINT

My name is Jason Naidoo. I was born in Durban, South Africa in 1966. I went to both primary and high school in a large Indian township called Chatsworth. At school I was an above-average pupil in all the subjects that had a knowledge orientation (such as Mathematics and Physical Science). I tended to be below average in the subjects that needed skills (such as Woodwork and Art).

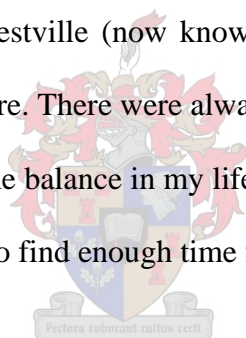
My learning approach was to focus on what I could do well and to ignore the things I struggled with except if it depended on passing or failing. I tended to memorise a lot without really understanding what I was doing. It is surprising how easy it was to do that even in a subject like Mathematics. In preparing for tests and examinations I spent many hours writing down what I thought I had learned. This approach was time-consuming and actually inhibited my learning. I later realised that I had hated learning for tests and examinations and had thus used this approach to while away the time. I used to convince myself that because I had spent so much time reading and writing it had been a fruitful learning session.

Not all the learning experience was negative. I once had an English teacher who made the subject come alive with rigorous debate and discussion. He taught us to be frank and honest whilst being

sensitive to the feelings of others. He used every opportunity to get us to think. We sometimes discussed soccer in class and I remember my teacher once telling me that I knew nothing about the game. I then thought that he did not know what he was talking about. I now know that he knew exactly what he was talking about.

Geography also tended to be exciting. My Geography teacher was often ill. Although she would arrive for the lesson she often did not teach but asked one of the pupils to lead the discussion on a chapter. It worked to our advantage. It sometimes became very interesting. I remember once trying to use the laws of physics to explain certain phenomena in a discussion on climate.

On completing school I obtained a Bachelor of Science Degree with Mathematics and Chemistry majors at the University of Durban-Westville (now known as University of KwaZulu-Natal). At university we were always under pressure. There were always tests, examinations, practical sessions and tutorial sessions. I tried to have some balance in my life as a student, but it was difficult. I loved to play soccer but could never manage to find enough time for soccer.



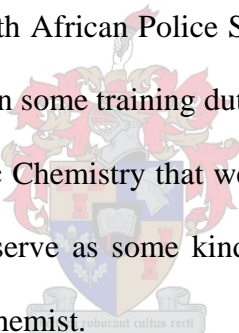
Chemistry and Mathematics are by nature abstract subjects. At university there was little time to read and really understand the subject matter. We prepared for tests and examinations with the aim of passing. We often did very little learning. Today I am able to use less than five percent of the knowledge I gained in Mathematics during the course of my degree.

My degree years comprised two phases, namely 1986-1988, when I completed Mathematics II and Chemistry II, and 1994-1995 when I completed Mathematics III and Chemistry III and gained the BSc. degree.

In my early working years I worked as a contract school teacher. I taught Mathematics and General Science from Standard 2 to Standard 10. These years were both rewarding and frustrating: rewarding in the sense that I was employed and able to make a positive impact on children's lives and frustrating in the sense that I was never really able to fit into the school environment because I was not fully qualified. In the teaching environment it is difficult to be accepted if you are not fully qualified.

1.2 MY TENURE AT THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICE FORENSIC SCIENCE LABORATORY

After completing my BSc. degree in 1995 I gained employment as a forensic chemist at the Forensic Science Laboratory of the South African Police Service. During my early years I showed an interest in training and was soon given some training duties. I conducted training sessions mostly for the detectives on aspects of Forensic Chemistry that were related to their work, such as exhibit collection. The training was meant to serve as some kind of interface between the world of the detective and the world of the forensic chemist.



The period from 1996 to 2001 was when I was most active in conducting this type of training. I spent many hours travelling to all ends of the country to provide various training sessions. I had the opportunity of meeting police members from all backgrounds. I spent many hours discussing life and learning issues with the police members. I enjoyed the travelling, especially since I always took my wife and son along. I also enjoyed the training.

South African police members are friendly and hospitable. This is true of police members of all races and ethnic groups. This is remarkable if one takes into account the difficult environment in which they operate. As I got to know the police members I realised that one of their frustrations was

that they have very little say in the decision making of the organisation. While some clearly had a grasp of their learning gaps they were unable to influence training interventions. The following shortcomings in our training interventions became obvious:

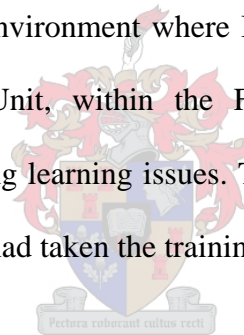
- The training material was often not suited for the audience.
- There was no carefully thought-out plan for nominating trainees and as a result there was a great degree of difference in knowledge and skills between the various trainees.
- Learning was conducted in a teacher-centred, content-driven manner.
- Somehow skills training, with an on-the-job training approach was almost completely neglected.

As I conducted the training sessions, I too started to become aware that most of the training conducted was ineffective. Very little learning took place. During this period I began intense reflections on my practice. As I began to question my practice; my own assumptions began to be challenged. Learning is about people's lives and as such it must involve them – this is what my “gut feeling” or intuition told me. With no academic sources or literature to support what I thought and felt, I knew that our learning approaches could be improved on. I am by nature a person who relies heavily on intuition. In fact, it often startles others to see me make decisions based on intuition. What is amazing is the number of times that decisions based on intuition have proved to be correct. In essence, my actions are based on *my* convictions – never on someone else's convictions.

As a result of my concerns I approached management at the Forensic Science Laboratory about learning issues. We discussed problem areas and looked for solutions. Some of the management staff gave me support, although not to the extent that I would have liked them to. Others simply said, “We are not a training institution.” Whether the responses were positive or negative, I found myself raising issues related to learning and the improvement and quality of people's lives at every opportunity I had with colleagues and management staff.

My interest in learning issues grew and in subsequent years I engaged in some short courses in teaching and training and eventually completed a diploma in teaching and training in 2001. In 2002, as a result of the recognition of prior learning, I was accepted into a Master's programme in lifelong learning at the University of Stellenbosch.

The South African Police Service (SAPS) is a difficult environment in which to work. The Forensic Science Laboratory (a component of the SAPS) bears the fruit of many years of racial oppression. Like my fellow colleagues of colour, I find it very difficult to establish my own ideas and identity in this environment. We are frequently denied opportunity. The road to securing a research project was a very difficult one. After 18 months of negotiations filled with disappointment, I was eventually able to gain entry into an environment where I could conduct research. I came upon a section, the Questioned Document Unit, within the Forensic Science Laboratory, that was experiencing serious problems regarding learning issues. The situation had reached the point where the learners, through the labour union, had taken the training manager to the labour court.

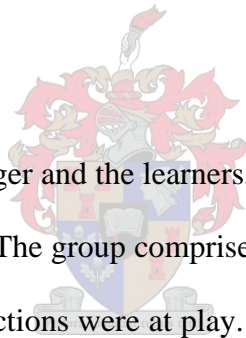


Having worked at the Forensic Science Laboratory for close to 10 years, I was aware of the learning culture of the FSL. Learning was still institution- and trainer-centred and almost totally content-driven. Relationships within the learning environment were generally hierarchical with a strong sense of command and control. Learners of colour tended to be “less successful” than their white counterparts. People of colour were in the majority as learners, and their white colleagues were in the majority as trainers. From 2002 some trainers of colour have been introduced in some sections of the Forensic Science Laboratory. This process is gaining some momentum.

Due to other roles that I performed in the workplace, I had regular contact with the training manager of the Questioned Document Unit (QDU) and was aware that the QDU was having

problems. Feeling that I could assist in bringing about positive change, I approached the senior manager and the training manager of that section and offered to try to facilitate a process in an attempt to find a solution. Management indicated that they would like me to help.

In offering to be part of the solution, as an insider-researcher, I had no illusions of what I was letting myself into. I was fully aware that apart from any other problems that might exist, there was always the legacy of institutionalised racism that was partly in operation in the Forensic Science Laboratory. The QDU was not exempt from this. Holian and Brooks (2004) indicate that an insider-researcher will have experience in the organisation, working relationships and information. I felt that as insider-researcher I was in an advantageous position because of my experience in the organisation. I also felt that I had been accepted to do the research as a result of my established credibility and working relationships.



Prior to meeting with the training manager and the learners, I had already decided I would suggest a participatory action research approach. The group comprised the training manager, learners and me. I was aware that complex human interactions were at play. I was also fully aware that the degree of success or failure of the action research hinged on the participation and contribution of the participants. Holian and Brooks (2004:6) indicate that in action research “the degree of freedom felt to participate, based on either positive or negative aspects of the relationship between parties could impact not only on the ethics of the research, but also the accuracy of the data and the quality of the findings.” Being aware of possible limitations did not deter me. I felt that if I could create a non-threatening environment and encourage participants to interact in an open, transparent and honest way, then we could resolve issues as members became more confident in the process.

I eventually met with the learners and the training manager and we explored the possibilities of using a participatory action research approach. The learners indicated that they would also like me

to help bring about a solution. There was, however, some scepticism about whether we would reach a solution. I consider the first meeting with the senior manager to be the beginning of the Participatory Action Research Project.

1.3 PERSONAL VALUES AND HOW THEY UNDERPIN MY STUDY

“Action research begins with values. As a self-reflective practitioner you need to be aware what drives your life and work, so you can be clear about what you are doing and why you are doing it.” (McNiff, 2002, quoted in Walsh, 2004:3)

As one of four children, I grew up in the Indian township of Chatsworth. My parents, like most Indians, were hardworking people, with strong family values. At home we were given chores to do and were held responsible for those chores. I most often complied with the requirements of my parents. I was also accustomed to doing errands and favours for the neighbours. I grew up helping others. In fact, I am a person who is most often overcome with a desire to help others.

I tended to be strong willed as a child and from a young age showed a lack of fear of punishment. I found that at school I often tended to defend children who were being bullied. I always felt that justice must prevail. I later realised that there is little justice in the secular world and hence much strife. I also found that I cared for the oppressed – this refers to any kind of oppression. I find that to this day I always crusade for the well-being of others. Within the learning context I am extremely passionate about issues of assessment as this tends to affect people’s lives in a more direct way. In South Africa there has been a long history where assessment has been used to subjugate, humiliate and oppress people. Coming from a background from which I have gained critical awareness, I tend to agree with Coles and Knowles (2000, quoted in Walsh 2004:4) when they suggest that “our personal histories have a powerful influence over our professional practice”.

Walsh (2004:4) says that “(a)s individuals, our unique experiences and different environments impart a system of values to us”. I tend to concur with Walsh as I find that in my own life I am aware of significant events that have influenced the way I think and behave. Coles and Knowles (2000, quoted in Walsh 2004:4), go on to say that “(y)ears from now, my actions of today will be the past and from them I will continue to learn. It is like a cycle that continues to spiral, developing us personally and professionally if we let it”. In the context of the action research endeavour within the Questioned Document Unit, I feel that my actions from the past, my experience and the choices that I have made (within the working environment) have developed me to the point where I am able to contribute to finding solutions in the workplace.

1.3.1 Spiritual Values

“As he thinketh in his heart so is he.” Proverbs 23:7

I have voluntarily sought to fulfil my spiritual needs. This process of spiritual search has given me values. Kuczarski and Kuczarski (1995, quoted in Walsh 2004:6) believe that “our family members, parents, siblings, teachers, peers and religious affiliations shape our values”. According to Walsh (2004), this kind of sentiment is echoed by Covey (1990) who says that the spiritual dimension is responsible for providing leadership to our lives.

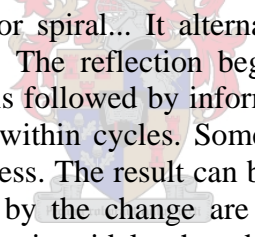
I believe that all people are created by God and as such should be respected. I further believe that everyone has potential and that we must help people fulfil that potential. This must be done irrespective of the person’s spiritual belief. The participative and consultative nature of participatory action research gives me an opportunity to help people realise their potential. Allowing participation is an acknowledgement that all people have some contribution to make in the learning environment. As people are encouraged to conduct self-enquiry, their potential is set free. Individuals can then navigate a journey of self-discovery, either as an individual or as part of a

group. Participation is a cornerstone of adult learning. I am comfortable with this and somehow I find that my spiritual beliefs seem to help me to work in tandem with the principles of adult and self-directed learning. Revans (1990, quoted by Forgrave s.a.) states that “the clever man will tell you what he knows; he may even try to explain it to you. The wise man encourages you to discover it for yourself, even though he knows it inside out.”

1.4 WHY CHOOSE PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH?

Learning is about people’s lives and as such they must be involved in the process. The problems experienced in the QDU were within the social setting of the workplace. According to Dick (2002), we use action research when we wish to achieve understanding and change at the same time.

Dick (2002:5-6) goes on to say:



Most action research is cyclic or spiral... It alternates between action and critical reflection as it moves forward. The reflection begins with critical review of the situation and of past actions. It is followed by informed planning of the next action. There are cycles within cycles within cycles. Some extend across an entire study. Others occupy only minutes or less. The result can be a very flexible and responsive process ...The people affected by the change are involved in the action and the critical reflection. Understanding is widely shared, and so is commitment to any planned change.

I felt that action research with participation would give us two distinct advantages, namely:

- It would give the people affected by the problem a chance to participate and make contributions and so the process would be credible and the solutions found would belong to the participants.
- It would give the participants a chance to be responsive during the process.

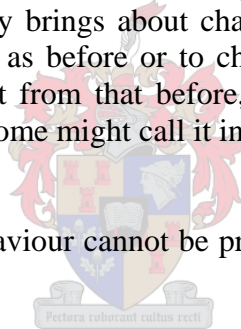
1.5 HOW WOULD I RECONCILE MYSELF TO THE RESULTS IF THEY WERE NOT AS I DESIRED?

When preparing to undertake a journey of this nature, there are questions that one will ask oneself. Will the participation be true and as desired? Will there be any real change (action) and will we learn anything from this venture? What will the magnitude of the participation, change and understanding be?

According to Wadsworth (1998:5-6) –

Participatory action research proceeds through cycles...there is always new action resulting – even if it is just the same as the old (which we might describe as reproducing the ‘status quo’). Inquiry inevitably leads somewhere – even if it isn’t far from where it started, or only a small number of people are consciously aware of it ...Things inevitably change as a result of research – the mere act of asking questions is an intervention in a situation, and giving and hearing answers and making sense of them inevitably brings about changes in those involved. Whether people then choose to continue as before or to change course means that the new situation will either be different from that before, or it will be the same. To ‘not change’ is nevertheless action: some might call it inaction.

Armed with the notion that human behaviour cannot be predicted I set forth on the journey of participatory action research.



CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH ISSUES

In this chapter I discuss the status of outcomes-based education (OBE) and training in South Africa. I then look into the policy and practice of OBE in the South African Police Service (SAPS), which is both a workplace and an adult learning environment. The literature review covers information on action research and participation within action research.

2.1 OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION AND ADULT LEARNING IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Much has been written about self-directed learning (SDL), adult learning (AL) and outcomes-based education (OBE) and training in South Africa in recent times. South Africa is in transition – there is a change in the education and training system. Learners, teachers, trainers and educators are now being exposed to the concepts of OBE, SDL and AL. The literature I review should inform on the status of the OBE, AL and SDL in the South African workplace with a special focus on the practices of education and training in the South African Police Service.

The South African government has passed legislation within the education and training environment to effect change. The South African Qualifications Authority Act (1995) has necessitated the formation of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). Together with the Department of Labour, SAQA is meant to act as guardian of all education and training in South Africa, both in the formal environment of institutions like schools, colleges and universities and in the informal environment of the workplace.

According to SAQA –

Qualifications and standards registered on the National Qualifications Framework are described in terms of the learning outcomes that the qualifying learner is expected to have demonstrated.

Hence there is an underlying commitment to a system of education and training that is organised around the notion of learning outcomes.
(The National Qualifications Framework: An Overview 2000:6)

Since much of this thesis deals with OBE as a practice within the workplace, I thought that it would be wise to refer to a description of OBE by Spady, one of its leading advocates. Spady (1994, quoted in Malan 2000:23) defines OBE as a ... “comprehensive approach to organising and operating an education system that is focused on and defined by the successful demonstrations of learning sought from each student. Outcomes are ... clear learning results that we want students to demonstrate at the end of significant learning experiences.”

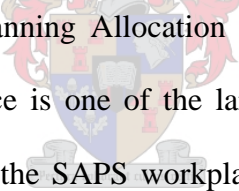
The change in the education and training system serves many purposes. Transformation (to deal with the legacy of apartheid), lifelong learning and the full personal development of learners for social and economic reasons are some of the imperatives of the new system as indicated in the document *An Interdependent National Qualifications Framework Consultative Document* (Department of Education, Department of Labour 2003). The change in the nature and quality of teaching and training is meant to have an enormous influence on the skills pool in the country. The breadth and depth of skills has a direct impact on the performance of the economy of a country.

Workplace learning is then seen as an important arena where learners develop personally and with the skills and knowledge gained contribute to the progress of the country. The workplace is the domain of the self-directed adult learner. Knowles (1975, quoted in Merriam and Brockett 1997: 138) describes the self-directed learner as one who diagnoses his needs, formulates goals, identifies human and material resources for learning, chooses and implements appropriate learning strategies

and evaluates learning outcomes. One can infer that Knowles is describing the process of self-direction as one where the adult learner is actively involved in his learning by virtue of his contribution to the process.

Adult learners in the workplace are now aware of OBE as a learning paradigm. As a result of their awareness, workers are starting to critically analyse learning practices in the workplace. This kind of awareness can be described as the “critical awareness” that Mezirow and Brookfield (1983, 1985 quoted in Peters, Jarvis and Associates 1991:194) ascribe to self-directed learners. Critically aware learners know what their real needs are and are able to identify and challenge existing assumptions.

2.2 THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICE AS A WORKPLACE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT



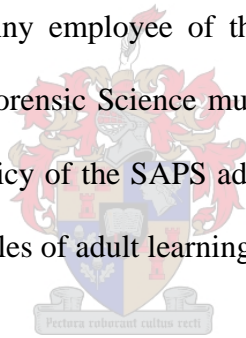
According to the Human Resource Planning Allocation of Human Resources document (SAPS s.a.:3), the South African Police Service is one of the largest organisations in the country, with about 140 000 employees. This places the SAPS workplace as a significant arena for workplace learning. According to its Education Training and Development Policy (s.a.), the South African Police Service, has embraced the OBE paradigm together with the principles of adult and lifelong learning. Instructional developers are compelled to take cognisance of the principles that guide adult learning.

At this juncture it would be relevant to note that research on adult learning by Suanmali (1981, quoted in Brookfield 1986:36) has generated certain principles on adult learning that include the following suggestions for adult educators. Below is a list of some of those principles:

- help the learner define his or her needs;

- help the learner to assume increased responsibility for defining, planning, and evaluating his or her own learning;
- organise what is to be learned in relationship to the learner's current problem, concerns and level of understanding;
- emphasise experiential and participative methods with the appropriate use of modelling and learning contracts.

The SAPS has as one of its departments a Forensic Science Laboratory. There are different sections within the Forensic Science Laboratory. Each section focuses on a different application of science. There are sections which employ science graduates to conduct scientific examinations and there are sections which have traditionally trained police members to conduct examinations, for example, the Questioned Document Unit (QDU). Any employee of the Forensic Science Laboratory who is recruited to conduct examinations in Forensic Science must undergo training to gain competence. As I mentioned earlier, the training policy of the SAPS advocates training practice within an OBE paradigm that acknowledges the principles of adult learning.



In South Africa, outcomes-based education and training is still finding its feet. The document, An Interdependent National Qualifications Framework System (NQF) Consultative Document (Department of Education. Department of Labour, 2003) acknowledges that there are difficulties in implementing changes of such magnitude. Meyer (n.d.:1) suggests that “currently most role-players are battling to understand the implications of this outcomes-based learning system on workplace education and training”. The SAPS, a microcosm of the country, is experiencing its own difficulties. At one stage there was such a lack of understanding of the process that the SAPS embarked on pursuing an SAPS qualifications framework. I was invited to a meeting of training personnel regarding the implementation of an SAPS qualifications framework. It was at this meeting that I explained to the senior management of the SAPS that in terms of the mandate of

SAQA to implement the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), the SAPS initiative would indicate a lack of understanding of the process on the part of the SAPS as there could not be two qualification frameworks in the country.

As a training coordinator within the SAPS and member of the Forensic Science Standards Generating Body (FS-SGB) for Education and Training I am privy to training practices within the SAPS. The SAPS training practices are still largely focused on training institutions and content with paper-based examinations and pass marks. Adult learners have little or no say in deciding how learning should proceed. For example, the Criminal Record Centre conducts a course that is focused on the collection of exhibits at crime scenes. The collection of exhibit material at crime scenes mostly requires practical competence. This course is classroom-based with no opportunity to gain practical competence. Learning is still heavily based on training manuals; in fact one cannot register a course within the SAPS if there are no content based training manuals. Training manuals are, in some instances, still written in terms of objectives and not outcomes. Another setback for the SAPS is the Forensic Science Standards Generating Body (FS-SGB) for Education and Training. The SAPS is the largest role-player in this SGB, which has not registered even one unit standard since its inception three years ago. However, there is still reason for optimism. The SAPS management is starting to show intent to move towards better practices in training and learning.

In April 2005 the SAPS made known its draft “On-the-job training (OJT) strategy for the South African Police Service”. According to a letter circulated by the SAPS, the purpose of the OJT strategy is to facilitate the cost-effective transfer and maintenance of job-related and task-specific knowledge, skills and competencies within the work environment to enhance and maintain overall job performances according to occupationally-prescribed standards.

In the words of Craig (1996:748, quoted in a SAPS letter (2005:4) on OJT), on-the-job training involves “assigning a learner to work with a more experienced employee, supervisor or peer to learn specific tasks in the actual workplace”. Their justification for doing OJT is that most knowledge, skills and competencies are transferred in the workplace.

Meyer (n.d.:1) describes the change in the education and training system as “a shift towards learning rather than teaching, to providing experience rather than information”. He goes on to say that “there is a move from normative, paper-based examinations towards outcomes-based assessment as reflected in national standards”. From experience and observation it is clear that the SAPS, in certain environments, is at odds with the current change.

A further objective of the OBE system according to Meyer (s.a.:1) is that “(t)his change is not only intended to meet the needs of industry more effectively, but also to create ‘empowered’ individuals who can take control of their own learning and their lives”.

In the context of the requirements of the safety and security sector and the country at large, the SAPS will fail to meet the needs of its sector and also fail to empower individuals if it does not implement OBE properly.

2.3 I CHOOSE ACTION RESEARCH BECAUSE I WANT A RESEARCH PARADIGM THAT IS RESPONSIVE

As I seriously considered the research action that I would engage in I experienced some uncertainty as to how I would approach the research action. I did, however, want to make a positive change in people’s lives through research. I was fully aware of the current status of education and training in the SAPS. In my discussions with senior members of the SAPS there was and still is agreement that

our learning approaches could do with much improvement. It is widely known that the SAPS strategy to address learning needs is neither responsive nor cost-effective. Training budgets, for example, are rigid and cannot be easily changed to meet arising needs. Once budgets are planned and approved there is little or no room for manoeuvrability. Some poor practices include the following:

- Huge amounts of money are used to ferry people to training colleges for the purposes of classroom learning.
- No proper needs analyses are done. It is common practice to request training assistance from departments at such short notice that it is impossible to do quality preparation.
- There is no strategy to promote autonomy and self-directed learning.

For workers at the lower levels it is virtually impossible to effect change for the organisation as a whole. The management style in the SAPS, in general, is not one where consultation is done with workers at a lower level in an attempt to find real solutions. Another problem with which the SAPS is faced with is that it is an organisation that is steeped in conflict and confrontation. There are always employees that are involved in some kind disciplinary or grievance action. It is difficult to obtain official SAPS documentation where the true number of grievances is reported. Attempts to access those documents have proved futile.

The SAPS by nature is not an organisation that inquires into its own practice. It is a command and control organisation, saturated with national instructions and special force orders. Autocratic personalities tend to flourish in the SAPS. What are then the possibilities of doing research in an environment like this and what kind of research approach would be suitable? There are limited opportunities for doing research in the SAPS. Any research that might indict the SAPS management would be discouraged. It is highly unlikely that the SAPS would allow anyone to inquire into its practice. It is also highly unlikely that recommendations following from traditional research

approaches would be used by an organisation like the SAPS, especially if its research findings agitate for change.

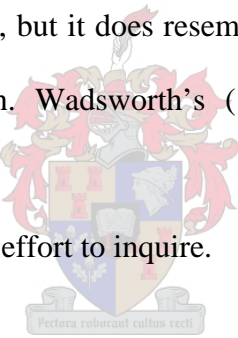
In the 1990s the business sector funded research into the viability of operating the police stations as business units. The recommendations of this research project have not been acted upon. Research was also conducted on the effectiveness of using e-learning training methods in the SAPS. Recommendations were made, but nothing has come to fruition in this regard either. The SAPS does not yet have an e-learning strategy or policy document. There is no e-learning practice in the SAPS. I do not have access to documents on the recommendations of both research projects. I know this because I work in the SAPS.

In the SAPS it is favourable to conduct research if management in a specific environment requests such research. Although it is rare to find an environment in the SAPS where management (note that training management is a management function) is willing to consult and negotiate on learning issues, it would be suitable to conduct research in an environment where there are possibilities for consultation and negotiation. A disadvantage of traditional research in the SAPS environment is that following recommendations from such a research project, management could find ways to stall, delay or even completely disregard the findings. Numerous reasons could be proffered for such behaviour. A research approach that is suitable is one that is *responsive*, that is, change and understanding happens during the process of research. It must be an approach that does not give management a chance to disregard it. It must also be one that by its very nature and process affords the participants an opportunity for change and understanding. Action research is a methodology that offers responsiveness as a result of the opportunity it creates for simultaneous change and understanding. Action research is not new. In fact, in the words of McNiff (2002:3) “action research began in the USA during the 1940s through the work of Kurt Lewin, a social scientist. It actually began in other places as well, but Lewin’s work is generally taken as the starting point”.

Action research is used mainly to inquire in social settings. Action research is at its core one of the most natural processes for inquiry. What do I mean? Human beings are involved in some kind of inquiry and action research every day of their lives. The method of planning, acting, observing and reflecting is something that we do in our everyday lives. Consider this example by Wadsworth (1998:3) that illustrates our daily involvement in inquiry and action research:

We are looking for our daughter's shoes in the early morning scramble. We review previous 'historical data' (memories of earlier experiences!) as part of planning our 'research design'. We generate several hypotheses and move quickly into the 'field' to involve other participants and gather new data to test them! We use some observational anthropology. Two brief interviews with daughter and sibling result in reports of failed hunches! (they weren't in their cupboards or on the back verandah!); we engage in further open-ended interviews with the entire household population. Then secondary analysis of the previous day's timetable generates a further hunch (Sports Day!: shoes replaced with runners) and an additional round of observation reveals: shoes in school bag!

The above example may be very simple, but it does resemble some of the structure and process of both conventional and action research. Wadsworth's (1998:3-4) ideas, in summary, are the following:

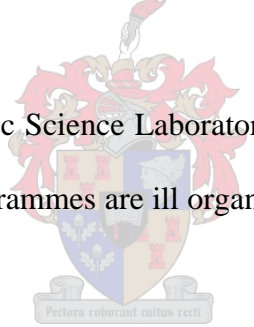
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- We stop what we are doing in an effort to inquire.
 - We raise a question.
 - We plan ways to get answers.
 - We engage in fieldwork about our new, current or past action in order to get an understanding of the situation.
 - We generate some kinds of answers.
 - We put into practice new ideas.
 - The process may repeat itself.

Dick (2002:2) describes action research as a flexible spiral process "which allows action (change, improvement) and research (understanding, knowledge) to be achieved at the same time. The understanding allows more informed change and at the same time is informed by that change.

People affected by the change are usually involved in the action research. This allows the understanding to be widely shared and the change to be pursued with commitment.”

People’s lives are important to me and I am passionate about this aspect of my life. In the workplace, training has a direct impact on people’s lives. In the Forensic Science Laboratory some training programmes last for three to six years (for example, the internal training programmes at the QDU and the Ballistics Unit). These programmes tend to be long and drawn-out and end up being burdensome to learners. Recently (2005) I was in a conversation with a training manager at the Forensic Science Laboratory, who expressed his delight at the fact that his learners are exposed to thousands of pages of notes. A training programme that is burdensome to learners creates a negative experience for learners, since learners are also workers who have to meet other requirements.

As a training coordinator at the Forensic Science Laboratory I find that learners tend to get highly frustrated and despondent as some programmes are ill organised. Some of the general problems that exist are the following:

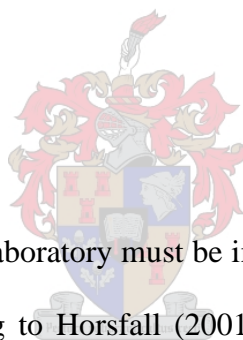
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- Learning is centred on trainers and institutions.
 - There is little or no consultation with learners.
 - Planning and execution of schedules is poor.
 - There are too many disruptions or temporary suspensions in training programmes.
 - The training programmes are too long.

One of the contentious and sensitive issues regarding learning at the Forensic Science Laboratory is that of assessment of learning. Assessments are judgements on how well the learners have performed. In the workplace, assessment has an impact on promotions, incentives and other rewards. As yet, the SAPS does not have a policy on the assessment of learning. We find that the

FSL focuses heavily on paper-based examinations, with some training managers requiring learners to achieve a “pass mark” of 80%. Learning is not seen as an experience or a process, but rather as a once-off examination that proves whether a learner is competent or not. Some learners are unhappy with this approach and we find that learners are starting to show “critical awareness” by challenging the training practices at the FSL. The learners’ current experiences negatively affect learner achievement.

At the Ballistics Unit of the Forensic Science Laboratory, the learners were so dissatisfied with the amount of content to be learned, overlapping content, irrelevant learning material and disorganised training schedules that they challenged the management until the training programme was revised and much of it was condensed.

2.4 CONCLUSION



The situation at the Forensic Science Laboratory must be improved. We need leadership, especially in the training environment. According to Horsfall (2001, quoted in Walsh 2004:13) “there is a clear link between leadership and the raising of student achievement”.

Walsh (2004) suggests that to raise student achievement one should use student-centred teaching and learning approaches and individual tutoring where students feel supported, valued and respected as individuals.

In our environment, management has shown very little leadership to meet the demands of a changing learning environment. Learners cannot and should not allow management to unilaterally determine how learning should proceed. Learners ought to be involved in decision making. Learners should agitate to position themselves as co-leaders in the learning environment.

One of the objectives set out in the SAQA document (2000:6) is to “contribute to the full personal development of each learner”. If this is to be honoured, then it is imperative that learners participate in decision making regarding their learning environment to the extent where they influence their learning environment.

Action research provides an opportunity for learners to be involved in the decision making process. As participants they may influence the outcomes of a change venture. Dick (1997:2-3) lists seven dimensions of participation:

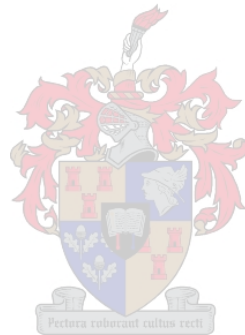
- providing data; the participants are informants;
- interpreting data; the participants are interpreters;
- planning change; the participants are planners and decision-makers;
- implementation; the participants are implementers;
- managing the process of data collection and interpretation; the participants are facilitators;
- designing the overall study; the participants are researchers or co-researchers; and
- being kept informed about the study and its implications; the participants are recipients only.

On **each** of these dimensions, there is a choice:

- Who is to participate?
- To what extent are they to participate?

In action research one does not want to manipulate or control the participation of participants. The contributions from the participants should direct the action research process. Dick (1993) suggests that we should let the data decide.

The intensive and unceasing advice from literature on action research, OBE and adult learning does much to indicate their importance. Research today is no longer one-dimensional. There is widespread acknowledgement that there is place for both action research and traditional research. Walsh (2004) informs us that the workplace is being more rigidly constrained by social justice laws and so there is a need for a research paradigm that can be responsive and hence successful in social settings. In my practice as a facilitator of learning I am acutely aware of the gaps that need to be filled in the changing learning environment. I am also aware of prevailing attitudes, hopes, fears and aspirations. It is within this context that I wish to help create a society in which social justice prevails. I will attempt to do this by helping to bring change and understanding.



CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I discuss the research methodology used. I then describe in detail how the participants and I (to whom I refer as “we” in future) progressed through the action research cycles. I discuss and analyse the change that occurred together with the dilemma that I experienced regarding the choice of the “New System” by some of the learners.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In surmising how to approach the existing situation at the Questioned Document Unit (QDU) we considered a few possibilities. After weighing up the options we decided that *action research* (AR) was the approach that we intended to use. The important factors to consider were (i) change and (ii) the generation of a body of knowledge (understanding). The organisation needed change and I needed to conduct research. The use of action research would satisfy both my needs and those of the organisation. What then is action research?

According to Dick (1993:5), “action research is a methodology which has the dual aims of action and research ... action to bring about change in some community or organisation or programme; research to increase understanding on the part of the researcher or the client, or both (and often some wider community)”.

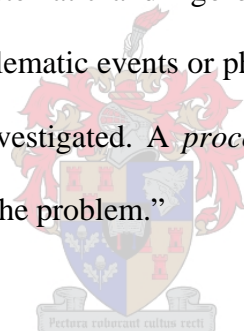
On investigating what other writers had to say about action research, I found that most writers indicated the following elements regarding action research: change, understanding, organisation, community and participation. I might have omitted on some, but in general these were the elements. The description of action research provided by Kock Jr, McQueen and Scott (1996:3) is similar to

the one given by Dick. These authors (Kock et al. 1996) describe action research as a research approach that rests

on socio-psychological studies of social and work-life issues. AR is often uniquely identified by its dual goal of both improving the organisation participating in the research project, usually referred to as client organisation, and at the same time generating knowledge. Although typically applying very little, if any, control on the environment being studied, the AR practitioner is expected to apply an intervention on this environment.

What is very important from the definition above, in addition to the elements of change and understanding, is that the AR practitioner should not try to manipulate the environment.

Before proceeding with the discussion, the concept of action research in relation to research in general, is put into context. A broader definition of research, which subsumes action research, is described by Stringer (1999:5) as “systematic and rigorous inquiry or investigation that enables people to understand the nature of problematic events or phenomena. Research can be characterised by the following: *A problem* to be investigated. *A process of inquiry*. *Explanations* that enable individuals to understand the nature of the problem.”



I now refer to the situation that presented itself. It was one where there were many problems that confronted the participants – both learners and training manager. According to Stringer (1999), research is meant to inquire into problems. Action research provides the approach for that inquiry.

From my very first interaction with the participants, it was obvious that the research approach that had to be used was one that was specific and responsive, as Dick (1993:6) points out that action research “provides a mix of responsiveness and rigour, thus meeting both the action and research requirements”. The responsive nature of action research implies that it can be used to address problems that are unique to a specific setting.

In our first session where I met with the participants we discussed as a group the need to (i) identify problems that were being experienced and (ii) how we would proceed from there on. This approach is in line with that advocated by Zuber-Skerritt (in Zuber-Skerritt and Kalliath, 2003:8) who says that the plan should involve “identifying issues, problems or concerns within the immediate and wider contexts, analysing the situation, and planning the intervention accordingly”. I suggested that we use an action research approach subsuming a *cyclic method*. I was aware that because the issues that were at stake were directly related to *values*, reflection would be a key component of the chosen method. Walsh (2004:24) suggests that one use the action research framework as proposed by Barret and Whitehead, which focuses on a process of reflection to promote change and enhance professional learning. In this process the practitioner’s *values* are very important.

3.2 FINDING THE RIGHT INGREDIENTS FOR PARTICIPANT INTERACTION

One of the issues on which I was deliberating was how we would interact in attempting to solve the problems that were being posed. I suggested that we use a structured focus group. While I did not use the term “structured focus groups” when introducing it to the group, the method I suggested was that of a structured focus group.

Dick (1998:1-2) describes a structured focus group in the following way:

A structured focus group is a facilitated group discussion in which open-ended questions are asked in a way to trigger discussion amongst a panel of participants. However, more effort is given to reducing the structure of the content so that the information is gained from the participants rather than being determined by the questions being asked. At the same time the *process* is more structured than is common, to increase the quality of information and the time economy of the procedure. Structured focus groups share with convergent interviewing the use of a structured process and unstructured content. They start in an open-ended fashion with minimal questions that will keep the group members participating.

For me, one of the important aspects to maintain within the structured process was encouraging and maintaining participation by the group members. Dick (1998:2) suggests that one should start with

“very general questions, and little guidance about the topic from the facilitator, this provides some protection from allowing the questions you ask to limit the answers you get. The process, on the other hand, is structured. This gives a higher quality of information and more efficient use of time.” The less inhibited the participants are the more freely they will express themselves. This should result in high quality information.

I used the term “participants” earlier on in this chapter and so I thought that it would be useful to elucidate its usage. “The general view of most current writers is that action research is necessarily participative” (Dick 1997:2). For research to be participative one requires participants. The question is: How do participants participate? From experience I have found that participation is not an all or none matter. It can vary and it is dependent upon many factors. Depending on the influences at hand it can be either minimal or substantial. Dick (1997:2) categorises the type of participation as “dimensions of participation”. Six of his dimensions of participation are (i) informants, (ii) interpreters, (iii) planners and decision makers, (iv) implementers, (v) facilitators and (vi) researchers and co-researchers. The initial idea and agreement that we had from the group (all the learners involved and the training manager) was that they would fulfil the following roles: providing data (informants), interpreting data (interpreters), planning change (planners and decision makers), implementation (implementers), managing the process of data collection and interpretation (facilitators) and designers of the overall study (researchers and co-researchers). When considering the above-mentioned dimensions one has to be aware of the extent of participation and the role the participants play in each dimension.

We did not have a clear idea how, for example, decision making and implementation would proceed. We were aware that in terms of organisational practice the power with regard to making decisions resided with the training manager and as such, he could veto or support any proposals made by the group.

In trying to determine who were going to be the participants we invited all the learners who were involved in the dispute with management to be involved in the project. All 10 learners were thus involved. The training manager represented management. We had no control over increasing the number of members representing management. I was a co-facilitator.

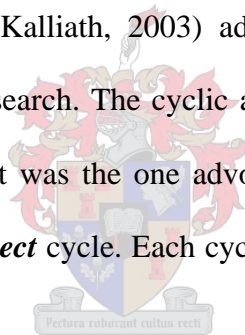
In my earlier discussions with management it was clear that I would be allowed to interact with the participants as long as there were clear boundaries. In setting up terms of reference for the Action Research Project (ARP), some of the important issues raised were the integrity and the impartiality of the facilitator (I). Dick (1997:2) supports the principle of having a facilitator from outside and says, “It is not unusual for there to be someone from outside the team who acts as a facilitator.” My mandate or terms of reference were stated very clearly. I had to focus on learning issues and not dwell on other human relation issues (these included accusations of racism and character flaws and the casting of aspersions on any member of the QDU). I indicated that this would be difficult for me to maintain simply because human relation issues might be linked to the problems being experienced and that these issues are inextricably linked to adult learning. I nevertheless committed myself to being sensitive to all learners, maintaining neutrality and refraining from entertaining accusations.

It is difficult to stimulate discussion that will bring real openness while at the same time trying to observe all of the points mentioned in the terms of reference. I was aware, however, that if we could unwaveringly adhere to the principle of determining the merit of the argument being advocated we would be able to sensitise the group to any good ideas that were being put forth. We would then be able to focus on principles of best practice in learning. This would automatically eliminate the possibility of focusing on poor practices – the achievement of which could be done without

accusing anyone. I must indicate though, that in an emotionally charged arena this is very difficult to achieve.

After having agreed to the terms of reference we set about discussing how we would proceed to use action research. I delivered an information session on action research and then facilitated discussion on action research. Some of the members were aware of the plan, act, observe and reflect cycle and its use although in different settings. For the discussion I mainly focused on the work of Dick and Zuber-Skerritt. According to Dick (1993:3-5), “(t)he action research cycle consists of at least intention or planning before action, and review or critique after ... Action research often starts with a fuzzy question and methodology; but provided each cycle leads to clarity, this is appropriate.”

Zuber-Skerritt (in Zuber-Skerritt and Kalliath, 2003) advocates the cyclic methodology as an approach that can be used in action research. The cyclic approach to the action research that was followed in this action research project was the one advocated by Zuber-Skerritt. This approach consists of a *plan, act, observe* and *reflect* cycle. Each cycle leads to another cycle, as indicated in Figure 3.1.



The Spiral of Action Research Cycles

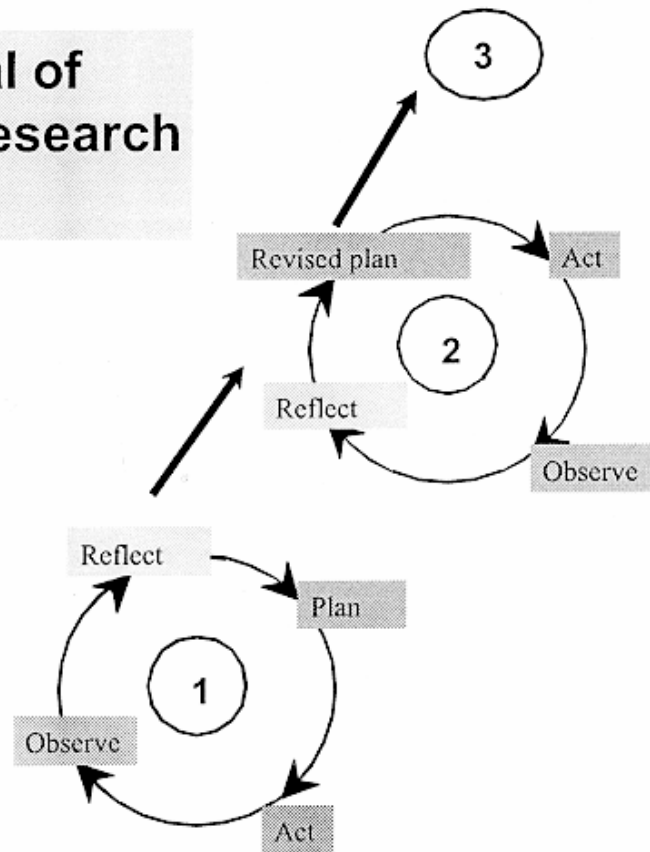
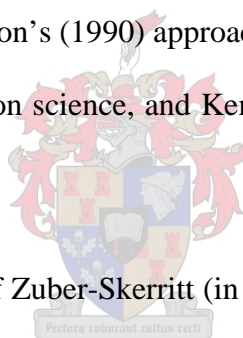


Figure 3.1: The Spiral of Action Research Cycles (Zuber-Skerritt and Kalliath 2003:8)

3.3 USING THE SPIRAL OF ACTION RESEARCH

With a plethora of information available on action research one has to choose carefully how one goes about proceeding with the research. One also has to be mindful that there is an action or change element to the process. The research design should in no way be burdensome or cumbersome to the extent where it impacts negatively on the process. The design should in no way try to direct the process artificially. Rather, the process should be dictated to by the data. In deciding how to approach action research one should consider some of the alternatives available.

Dick (1993:12) states that “(t)here are many ways to do action research. It is a research paradigm, which subsumes a variety of research approaches. Within the paradigm there are several established methodologies. Some examples are Patton’s (1990) approach to evaluation, Checkland’s (1981) soft systems analysis, Argyris’s (1985) action science, and Kemmis’s critical action research (Carr and Kemmis, 1986).”



I used the cyclic method (or “spiral”) of Zuber-Skerritt (in Zuber-Skerritt and Kalliath, 2003). Each cycle was used to gather information with the purpose of making use of that information. The later cycles were used to discuss, challenge, verify, refute or confirm information gathered in an earlier cycle. In effect, the study was a process of iteration. Within this process we were able to gradually refine our understanding of the situation in which we were participating.

Before my first interaction with the group and during the AR process, I spent much time reflecting on the possible factors that would come into play in the process. O’Brien (1998:4) provides an overview of six key principles as articulated by Winter (1989) that could influence the action research process, namely reflexive technique, dialectical technique, collaborative resource, risk, plural structure and theory, practice and transformation. The risk principle helped increase my awareness regarding the possible emotions that will be at play.

In describing risk, O'Brien (1998:4) suggests that –

The change process potentially threatens all previously established ways of doing things, thus creating psychic fears among the practitioners. One of the more prominent fears comes from the risk to ego stemming from open discussion of one's interpretations, ideas, and judgments. Initiators of action research will use this principle to allay others' fears and invite participation by pointing out that they, too, will be subject to the same process, and that whatever the outcome, learning will take place.

Armed with this information I felt more comfortable to tackle the project.

3.4 THE JOURNEY BEGINS

I had my *first* interaction with the participants in mid-March 2005. It was in the form of a meeting. We met to discuss learning problems experienced at the QDU and to try to find and implement a solution. I used the structured focus group as a technique to stimulate discussion. This type of technique gives the participants an opportunity for active participation and is hence responsive. Maximum participation would generate greater commitment and therefore action.



Many problems were highlighted in our first meeting. Below are the responses from the participants just as they were articulated (all the points except the last one were made by the learners):

- *Politics cannot be divorced from learning.*
- *We want in-service training to do the job.*
- *Training methods need to change. Need more practical training and less theory.*
- *We want the best way of transferring skills. The 'how' part of it.*
- *Mock trials should not be used to demean learners.*
- *Mentors and other trainers should be brought into the process of change that we are considering implementing.*
- *Classroom learning takes too much time.*

- *Existing theory tests are too long and take too much time.*
- *There must be transparency and honesty.*
- *Training methods hamper learning. Learning areas tend to change all the time. No continuity. Lost interest.*
- *Classroom learning not effective. Learners must be treated as individuals. Learners learn at different pace.*
- *Want discussion sessions. Want all information regarding training.*
- *Want inclusive approach. All role-players must be involved.*
- *Want the learning approach that worked with other successful learners – (Suspicion that other learners were favoured - author.).*
- *Must have time frames and target dates.*
- *Want critical learning, that is, learning that is needed to commence casework.*
- *Want time frames and target dates for action plan.*
- *Want to know what the embedded knowledge requirements are to begin with casework.*
- *Lack of communication. Information is withheld from us.*
- *Some of the learners were not cooperative. (This contribution was made by the training manager.*

In summary I would say that the themes that became evident during the contributions by the participants were relationship, communication, participation and learning by doing.

3.5 PROGRESSING THROUGH THE CYCLES

3.5.1 The First Cycle

On considering all the problems being put forward by the group of learners we found that the research question was not clear. I have said earlier that in action research the initial question is fuzzy. Fuzzy questions provide fuzzy answers. According to Dick (1993:14), the important point is

that “(p)rovided that the fuzzy answer allows you to *refine both question and methods*, you eventually converge towards precision. It is the spiral process which allows both responsiveness and rigour at the same time.” Dick uses the word “fuzzy” to describe an unclear research question. He attributes this lack of clarity to the way in which people interact. As I indicated earlier, we maintained the use of the structured focus group to help gain clarity. After much discussion on how we would address the problems listed above, we decided that the **plan** (this was the plan stage for the first cycle) for moving forward would be that I would deliver training sessions on the following:

- facilitation skills;
- self-directed learning;
- outcomes-based learning and assessment; and
- the ownership of learning.

The first cycle was unfolding.



I left the session knowing that the problems were many and that the solution needed to be carefully crafted. One of the issues that had been clearly highlighted by the learners was the lack of participative processes (includes the lack of consultation and communication) regarding the learning environment. The other issues were related to learning methods and relationship issues. Relationship issues are not easy to solve. In general, honesty and transparency will help mend relationships where trust is an issue. I knew that for us to have any hope of gaining ground, participation was necessary. According to Dick (1993), participation can generate greater commitment and hence action.

As agreed earlier on (see reflective journal), I returned for the session where I would deliver the training sessions that we had agreed on. This was the act stage of the first cycle. The training session consisted of two case studies. The case studies were taken from literature and were actual

real-life events. They focused on (i) relationships and (ii) involving adult learners in the learning process. Once again we had discussions, which included questions and suggestions.

Zuber-Skerritt (in Zuber-Skerritt and Kalliath, 2003:8) calls the third stage of the cycle **observe**. During the observing stage one is meant to observe and evaluate the **action** or **intervention**. I found that when one is in the process of an intervention it is important to try to maintain an awareness of what is happening. This is crucial to the purposes of observation. In the type of intervention in which we were involved I had a perfect opportunity to observe the participants from close up.

The training session, which was the **act** stage, was meant to be the first step in trying to resolve problems at the Questioned Document Unit. One of the main aims of the session was to elicit reaction from the participants and to stimulate as much discussion as possible. As I indicated earlier, we used the structured focus group to achieve this objective. As a result, spontaneous discussion ensued with much exchange of ideas. There was not always agreement. Disagreement further encouraged debate and the exchange of ideas. We managed to use the discussion sessions to crystallise ideas and concepts while creating awareness regarding attitudes and practices relating to learning. This discussion session helped create awareness on few critical issues, namely relationships, attitudes, the need for solving problems, focusing on the job and the need for adults to work together.

The **reflecting** stage is the last stage of the plan, act observe and reflect cycle.

According to Zuber-Skerritt (in Zuber-Skerritt and Kalliath, 2003:8) one is supposed to engage in “reflecting on the results of the evaluation, trying to understand the change process, and conceptualising what worked and what did not work and why, revising the plan and then going

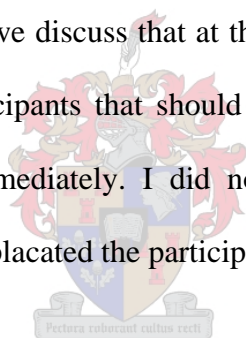
through the next cycle(s) of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, etcetera until the desired changes have been made in the given timeframe.”

The results of the evaluation had both positive and negative aspects. The achievement of discussion and dialogue was seen as positive. What was even more encouraging was the fact that the interaction was mostly non-confrontational. The identification of key issues together with the fact that we had managed to construct a **plan** for the next cycle of plan, act, observe and reflect was also seen as a positive aspect. There were still some members who were still sceptical with regard to the issues that were being highlighted as key issues. They felt that there were other issues at play that we were ignoring; for example, they felt that a previous group of learners had experienced an easy, barrier-free learning encounter and wanted to know why theirs was being complicated and burdensome. With some misgiving they agreed to the plan as put forward by the other members of the group. The second cycle would see us explore the possibilities raised by the suggestions we had received.



We looked at the change process in conjunction with what worked and what did not work and why. The part of the process that worked well was the open forum question and discussion sessions. This forum seemed to give the members an opportunity to express themselves freely. For the most part, this seemed to work. We attempted to make the environment non-threatening by imploring participants to listen to each other and not to be aggressive or demeaning when making a contribution. The **obvious change** was the fact that we had managed to get management and learners to open up communication channels and to engage in constructive discussion. Another obvious change was the participants' increased understanding (or increased knowledge) of the adult learning environment.

Whilst I have indicated that the members expressed themselves freely there was still some inhibition. The training manager, for example, reserved some of his comments for after the meeting. He approached me after the first meeting when I was alone, and made some disparaging remarks regarding some of the learners and intimated that some of the suggestions made by the learners were not acceptable. I tried by all means to discourage this kind of private discussion, knowing full well that it was unethical, especially in the context of the openness that we were trying to create. He knew full well that I would not be able to address any issues that had not been raised in the structured focus group sessions. It seemed that the training manager was not really in favour of (i) participation and (ii) the consensus approach that we were trying to create, although he did not openly say it. This was confusing to me since we had begun the process with a view to gaining consensus on problem areas. Had he indicated clearly that he was not in favour of the consensus approach I would have suggested that we discuss that at the next meeting. I had on more than one occasion clearly indicated to the participants that should they want the process to stop, for any reason, they should let me know immediately. I did not want to have a situation where we encouraged a type of participation that placated the participants.



For me, **participation** and consensus of the learners was paramount. As Stringer (1999:6-7) puts it, “action research is based on the assumption that the mere recording of events and formulation of explanations by an uninvolved researcher is inadequate in and of itself. A further assumption is that those who have previously been designated as ‘subjects’ should **participate** directly in research processes and that those processes should be applied in ways that benefit all participants directly.”

My experiences were that we were not engaging in an experiment or activity that was an exact science or pure mathematics. There were the elements of emotion, perception, feelings and conjecture. All these elements are subjective and may change. We found that the first cycle was a journey into the unknown with **no sure clarity** of either the question or the answer. We hoped and

expected that the iterative aspect of the cyclic approach would both refine the question and bring us closer to the answer. That approach is supported by Dick (1993) who suggests that the whole process of action research is to determine simultaneously an understanding of the social system and the best opportunities for change. If you are to be adequately responsive to the situation, you cannot begin the exercise with a precise question. The question arises from the study. He goes on to say that we should **let the data decide**. At each step, we should use the information so far available to determine the next step.

3.5.2 The Second Cycle

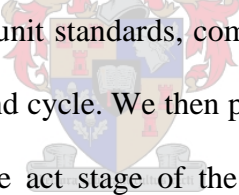
The second cycle followed from the first cycle, being directed by the data obtained in the first cycle. In a theoretical sense there are clear cycles, but in reality that demarcation is not so clear. We found that as participants and as individuals we were constantly engaging in planning and reflecting as individuals – outside the formal cycle in which we were involved as a group. Even the simple act of thinking about the process or reading literature related to the research process outside the formal cycle meant that we were engaging in action outside the formal cycle. As individuals, our acts of planning, acting, observing and reflecting in our personal environments can be construed as tiny cycles outside the formal cycle. This happened continuously during the action research process.

Wadsworth (1998:6-7) describes these informal cycles in the following way:

... countless tiny cycles of participatory reflection on action, learning about action and then new informed action which is in turn the subject of further reflection. Every minute of every hour may see participants absorbing new ways of seeing or thinking in the light of their experience, leading to new related actions being taken on the spot. Often these will pass unnoticed and unrecorded, but with practice these too become the subject of further reflection and group self-understanding. Change does not happen at the end, it happens throughout.

The **plan** to go about refining the learning programme so that it would be relevant within the context of OBE and adult learning and the reviewing of the unit standard was formulated during the discussion sessions. This plan became the plan of the second cycle.

The first meeting of the second cycle was to review a unit standard and its corresponding learning programme. The review of the unit standard and the learning programme would be the **act** part of the second cycle. The session did not start off very well. The training manager had failed to disseminate copies of the unit standard to the participants for perusal. The members were unprepared and indicated their dissatisfaction. Taking cognisance of the lack of opportunity for preparation on the part of the learners, we discussed how we should proceed and it was agreed that I should facilitate a short learning session that should focus on unit standards, learning programmes and competence and how they should relate to each other.



I conducted a short training session on unit standards, competence and learning programmes. This became part of the act stage of the second cycle. We then proceeded to conduct a review of the unit standard. This as I said earlier was the **act** stage of the second cycle. The review was neither comprehensive nor in-depth and so the desired effect of the review was not achieved. What the session did achieve was to give the learners a very basic understanding of what a unit standard was and then to be able to relate it in a very basic way to learning programmes and competence. The concepts of learning programmes, competence and unit standards are very abstract to those who are not familiar with them. The learners grappled with understanding some of the concepts and their relation to each other.

On observing and evaluating the intervention, we realised that while there were some learning gains in terms of understanding unit standards, learning programmes and competence and their relation to each other, we had not fully achieved what we had set out to do. We decided that the only way

forward was for each member to be given time to prepare for another review session where we would conduct a comprehensive review. We agreed to meet again on 22 April 2005. In reflecting on the results of the evaluation we found that we had made slow progress. This was due to the lack of cooperation on the part of the training manager. Why the training manager did not forward the unit standard to the learners prior to review session I do not know. Had he simply forgotten? Had he been negligent? Had he deliberately withheld the document from them so that they would be unprepared at the review session and so that he would be able to push his ideas without any counter-proposals from the learners? It is difficult to understand what really transpired in the mind of the training manager.

We met on 22 April 2005 to review the unit standard. At the beginning of the session I asked the learners for any comments or additional ideas that they might have. The learners indicated that they once again wanted me to facilitate a short learning session on adult learning, outcomes-based education and training and assessment. Assessment was something that we had briefly discussed previously. I could see that they wanted to find out more about assessment and how it should be used in OBE. I went on to facilitate the learning session and then we looked at what the group felt was important for this session. As a group we discussed the situation and felt that the following must happen:

- We had to review the unit standard (this was agreed on in a previous group discussion).
- We had to review the learning material.
- We had to look at ways of reducing the content of the programme. The learners had to learn on-the-job skills and have sufficient knowledge to do the job. We had to consider the advantages and disadvantages of a long training programme.
- We had to consider whether we should go the route of a shortened training programme then have continuous training to plug any competency gap.
- We had to discuss the impact of a shortened training programme and consider the

advantages and disadvantages.

- We had to consider the issues of transparency and contemplate the advantages and disadvantages of a lack of transparency.

We proceeded to navigate the points as mentioned above, but there was a distinct lack of cooperation from the training manager and some of the learners. I then decided to probe by asking questions to try to elicit responses that would help me to understand why there was a lack of cooperation. The training manager was not in favour of the following:

- reducing the content of the programme;
- a shortened training programme;
- focusing more on the practical competence and less on foundational competence; and
- having continuous training to cater for any knowledge gap that may arise from a shortened training programme focusing primarily on practical competence.

Some of the other learners then raised a point that had been mentioned in a previous discussion session, but on which we had not really focused. They wanted to be exposed to the same training method (on-the-job, practical competence-based training) that had been successful with a previous group of trainees. That group of trainees had been white South Africans as opposed to the current group who were black South Africans. I realised that this was an issue that could not be avoided and so I used the opportunity to facilitate discussion around that point. This was a complete turnaround from what we had planned to do.

Wadsworth (1998: 6-7) suggests:

In participatory action research, while there is a conceptual difference between the 'participation', 'action' and 'research' elements, in its most developed state these differences begin to dissolve in practice. That is, there is not participation followed by research and then hopefully action. A hallmark of a genuine participatory action research process is that it may change shape and focus over time (*and sometimes quite*

unexpectedly) as participants focus and refocus their understandings about what is ‘really’ happening and what is really important to them.

We decided to consider the learning approach that had been previously used successfully and the one that was currently being proposed. We had called the previous one the GMR system, with G, M and R being the first letters of the first names of the learners. We called the current system being advocated the new system. The discussion centred for a while on which system we should choose. The group then decided that we should list the advantages and disadvantages of both systems. Having listed the advantages and disadvantages we decided to go away and ponder the matter and to return on 3 May 2005 to evaluate the two systems and make suggestions on how to proceed.

If we consider what had happened we would realise that the **act** stage of the second cycle had been extremely dynamic. Notable change had occurred. What we observed was the participants coming to the fore as co-researchers by making their own suggestions as to how the inquiry should proceed. They were starting to guide the inquiry into their practice. This is in line with the thinking of Reason and Bradbury (s.a.) who assert that “action research is at its best a process that explicitly aims to educate those involved to develop their capacity for inquiry both individually and collectively”. They were definitely developing their capacity to inquire both individually and collectively.

The **act** or **intervention** stage of the second cycle had been productive since real issues had been raised, thus challenging the existing assumptions. The simple act of listing advantages and disadvantages had given the learners an opportunity of expressing how they felt while at the same time hoping that their contributions would be considered. This exercise had provided a platform for learners to critically review their positions and to make choices. The positive change in the learners’ attitude was evident as they realised that this was a real opportunity to address what they considered to be the root cause of their learning problems. As I said earlier, this cycle showed evidence that the

learners were developing their capacity for inquiry both individually and collectively. This session was open and transparent. If body language is anything to go by then the only negative aspect of this session was negative body language of the training manager. He was not in favour of using the GMR System with the new learners and did not make any significant contribution to the discussion. For the most part he just remained silent. His only contribution came at the end where he insisted that there must be a written test irrespective of which system was being used.

3.5.3 The Third Cycle

The third cycle of plan, act, observe and reflect started with the **plan** to evaluate the two systems and to consider which learning system to implement. On 3 May 2005 we met to evaluate the two systems. The evaluation and selection of a system was the **act** stage of the third cycle.

The training manager indicated that he would not attend the session. His reason was that the learners were using the information gained from him at these sessions to oppose him in the labour court case. He nevertheless indicated that we might proceed with the session. As the facilitator I felt that we must proceed since that was what we had collectively agreed on in our previous session. I was, however, in favour of terminating the process should everyone have been in favour of doing that. We met and the group decided to proceed with the evaluation. The summary of the two systems is presented below.

The New System

This system is based heavily on theory. The theory is meant to be learnt by reading large volumes of notes (content) in tandem with classroom lectures (both long and short). There are also long theory assignments. Practical work follows the successful completion of the theoretical aspect. Assessment is conducted using long theory tests, practical tests and proficiency tests.

This system is a long, drawn-out training approach that makes it easy for learners to lose focus. Learners tend to forget what they have learnt (knowledge) because they do not have a chance to apply their knowledge while they are gaining knowledge. In essence, much of the learning is not sustainable. Planning also becomes difficult because of the many interruptions over a long period of time.

The GMR System

This system was streamlined and was based heavily on gaining practical competence. Theory and practical work were done simultaneously. It was a speedy and efficient learning approach. Learners worked closely with the facilitator. One could say that the facilitator acted as a mentor or coach using an on-the-job training method. It was easier for learners to take ownership of the learning process. Ultimately, it produced results (the competence of the learners) quickly.

We did not have much insight into the assessment conducted except that much of the assessment was based on the practical aspect, that is, the successful completion of casework.

The outcome of the evaluation was that some of the learners opted for the GMR System while some opted for the New System. At this meeting five of the learners chose the New System and one learner chose the GMR System. The four learners that did not attend this meeting later indicated that they were in favour of the GMR System. So, there were five learners in favour of the GMR System and five learners in favour of the New System. In addition to choosing either of the systems the learners indicated the following:

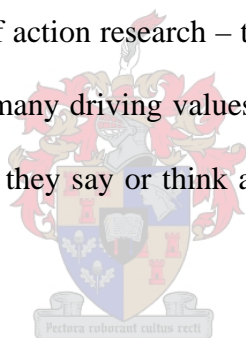
- Learners must be relieved of duties that have a negative impact on their learning.
- As part of training, learners must be given casework that enhances practical competence.

- Learners must write tests that are contextual.
- There must be commitment from both parties to make the system work.
- Learners must be given clearly defined time frames where possible.
- The learners must be given dates for assessment and learning activities well in advance.
- There must be clear and constant communication.
- Each learner must be given reasonable freedom to proceed at his/her own pace.

We then agreed that I would compile a report on the proceedings of the meeting and include the recommendations of the learners. When evaluating the **act** stage of the third cycle one has to take cognisance of the absence of the training manager and the possible impact it had on the session. During this session the learners spoke with more freedom than at any of the other sessions. The learners were also far less confrontational. What was very evident was the conciliatory attitude of the learners. They were willing to accept most of the suggestions made by their training manager in a previous meeting. They were even willing to write a theory test. They seemed to have changed from a mode of asserting what they wanted to one of compromise – in simple terms they had reduced their requests. The only stipulations by those who preferred the New System were the eight points bulleted above. Some of the learners indicated that they were willing to proceed with the new system provided that the eight points listed above would be considered. There was a definite shift in the thinking of some of the members of the group. I could not explain the sudden change in attitude. There were still some members who were more concerned with *how* the training programme was conducted and remained steadfast on their demands. For the first time the evaluation of the two learning systems gave the learners an opportunity to make an informed opinion of how they wanted learning to proceed.

As I indicated earlier, at the end of the third cycle the group of learners were divided in terms of what their requirements were. One part of the group was now in favour of the New System whilst the other part of the group still felt that the old GMR System was the most suitable approach.

I obviously wondered why some of the group were suddenly willing to opt for the New System and deviate from their original requirements (which were contained in the GMR System), which we had collectively determined as being imperative for learning to progress. Being exposed to this kind of situation forced me into reflection and I remembered that Wadsworth (1998:2) explains some aspects of human interaction that may account for the happenings in the third cycle when she says, “Participatory action research is a description of social research per se (albeit social research which is more conscious of its underlying assumptions, and collectivist nature, its action consequences and its driving values).” This I found true of action research – that while it is collectivist in nature there are many underlying assumptions and many driving values. Working with participants has its own uncertainties. People may change what they say or think at any given time and one may never be privy to the reason.



The participants, while being involved in the group as a whole, were still individuals. It is natural for individuals to re-assess their experiences and to make choices that differ from previous ones. At that time I assumed that the reason for the learners compromising their stance was that it had become more important for them to complete their training than to be concerned how well the learning proceeded and if at all, any learning had taken place.

While still trying to understand the process and the sudden change in some of the learners I was reminded by the principle of ‘let the data decide’. What if you as the facilitator, are unhappy with the data? These and other issues constantly face the action researcher. Why did I dwell on these issues? As I reflected on the recommendations of the learners I felt a profound sense of frustration. I

wondered why some of the learners had made a change in their stance regarding the two systems. Why the sudden change? Had anything transpired in the workplace recently? Why were we engaging in this action research project? I asked the questions Wadsworth (1998:5-6) asks: “Where did the hunches or hypothesis come from? Are they just any old hypotheses, or have they been carefully constructed and well grounded, over time, from deep and engaged involvement in the field being studied? Are they plausible? Are they relevant? Are they well-evidenced and thus already substantiate new action?” The burgeoning question was, where to from here?

One has to ask these questions because new paradigm social science (or participatory action research) considers it critical to the success of the inquiry that the hypothesis is relevant and useful.

Other questions about the process began to surface:

- Did I raise critical questions relevant to the study during the discussion sessions?
- Should we not have had two different groups for the process?
- Did I miss some key contributions during the first two cycles?
- Did we address the correct questions?

In an attempt to answer my questions I went back to basic assumptions of action research and found that Wadsworth (1998:6) explains it well when she says that “(p)articipatory action research is *aware* of its inevitable intervention in the social situations within which it operates and *seeks* to turn these to consciously-applied effect.” I learnt two important lessons from this action research project. Firstly, when we say *let the data decide*, we should be prepared to get a result that is determined by the data. While the result might not always be desirable to some, it is one that is the product of the participants. Secondly, action research *seeks* to bring change. The seeking may not always get the desired result from the perspective of one or more of the participants. Sometimes the change may be very minor but it is still change.

In trying to understand the lack of significant change, I found that some of the reasons suggested by Zuber-Skerritt (in Zuber-Skerritt and Kalliath, 2003) provided some insight into when action research works well. She says that “action research only works successfully if all members of a team own the problem and are interested in solving it; if they work on the problem collaboratively and voluntarily, rather than being co-opted, manipulated or forced on the team by a sponsor or superior; and if they are open for change, critical review, reflection and self-evaluation” (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996:88).

I thought that the sudden change in attitudes might be due to a few reasons. They could be described as follows:

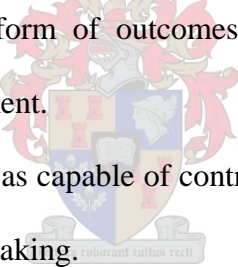
- Learners felt under pressure to complete the learning programme without further delays.
- There was pressure by management.
- Learning issues were less important than completing the programme.
- The reasons that they had proffered earlier on were not their own reasons, but had been given without knowledge or understanding of what they wanted. Alternatively, the reasons were not given voluntarily, but had been foisted on them by their colleagues.

In putting the process into perspective I had to consider the role I had performed and to describe the role that I had performed. I used the description given by Wadsworth (1998) who suggests that the ‘researcher’ becomes facilitator of or an assistant to the critical reference group’s own pursuit of *their* truth (or truths).

I feel glad that I have been involved in helping the group pursue *their* truth rather than try and impose my idea of truth on them.

The results of this project up to that point reminded me that human beings should not be controlled and their behaviour should not be predicted. According to Wadsworth (1998), human actors are both wilful and capable of thwarting research prediction, and wilful and capable of selecting and implementing theories or probabilities they want to see manifest. In this action research project I would not say that the participants had thwarted the expected outcome, but the sudden deviation was unexpected. The products were totally those of the participants. Ownership of the process and its products can be assigned to the participants.

After all is said and done, what question/s arose from the study? One of the pursuits of the cyclic approach to action research is to gain clarity on the issues/questions at hand. In summing up and assessing the process and the key responses and concerns of the participants, the following issues become clear:

- 
- There is a need for a purer form of outcomes-based education. The learners require contextual learning and assessment.
 - The learners regard themselves as capable of contributing to the learning process and want to be involved in the decision making.
 - The learners want the trainer to establish a relationship with them.
 - Communication is integral to the success of the programme.

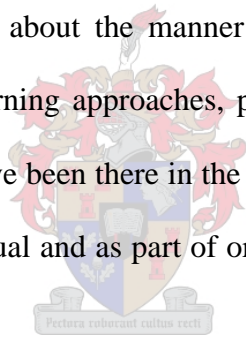
In reflecting on the question/s that arose from the study I was clear in conscience that those were the needs expressed by the learners. I am glad that I did not try to manipulate the situation in an effort to bring about the change that I perceived as desirable. In trying to understand the outcome of the action research project I was encouraged by the words of McNiff (1988:52) when she says “In my days as a skilled technician, I stood on the sidelines, directing the game and scoring. I was an observer and a manipulator of other people's experience. Now I join in the game. I win and I lose; I live and I learn.”

I have learnt to accept minor change, because it is part of life, life being a journey.

3.6 CONCLUSION – REFLECTING ON THE OUTCOMES

At a meeting with my supervisor to discuss the process of the research he asked me some critical questions regarding the process and the outcomes achieved up to that stage. He felt that the research was very thin at that point, as we had not achieved any significant change. I differed from him and have much literature to support my viewpoint. However, I felt that he had a worthy case in suggesting I meet with the group again to have a reflective session.

I have always been deeply concerned about the manner in which learning is conducted in the Forensic Science Laboratory. Poor learning approaches, poor management of learning, racism in learning and favouritism in learning have been there in the 10 years that I have been at the Forensic Science Laboratory. Both as an individual and as part of organised groups of people I have tried to fight against the ills mentioned above.



I have previously said that I was disturbed by the choice of some of the learners to opt for the New System and I have given much opinion as to why I had thought that they had done so. Even though I felt that I had “completed” the research I was still not happy with the change. I was still in contact with members of that unit and with the labour unions with the aim of improving the practice of learning, not just at the QDU, but in the FSL at large. It was within this context that I arranged to meet with the group again.

I met with the group on 27 September 2005 to reflect on the process thus far. I then found out that since our last meeting and the subsequent submission of the recommendations by me as requested

by the group, there had been some significant change. Immediately after our last meeting the situation had apparently worsened. The relationship between the learners and the training manager had become even more strained. Some of the members had not received any training from the training manager, whilst some members of the group had been receiving training. The training manager had indicated that he only wanted to train people who were willing to learn. The learners countered that the training manager was training people “in secret”. They said that the ones being trained were members who were not willing to challenge his approach.

During July 2005, in the midst of this turmoil, both the learners and the training manager attended a session at the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA). Subsequent to the conciliation and arbitration meeting in July 2005 at the CCMA, the **other changes** started to happen. During August 2005, the learners succeeded in convincing their management to replace their training manager with another trainer. This trainer commenced as trainer of the group early in September 2005. As part of an agreement reached with management, the trainer would facilitate learning – his roles and responsibilities or mandate had however not yet been clearly defined. The trainer would then plan and conduct the assessment together with an assessor from within the SAPS and a learner (nominated from within the group). The Director of the QDU would then moderate the assessment.

This news was refreshing to me as it indicated that the learners were being allowed to participate in the decision making, and the presence of an assessor (from within the SAPS but from outside the Forensic Science Laboratory) might help bring credibility to the process.

We then discussed the status of training with the new trainer. The new trainer, who worked at the QDU, was an expert in the field of questioned documents. The learners then indicated that they were experiencing the following with the new trainer:

- The trainer was willing to discuss all aspects of learning with the group.
- His focus was more on practical competence (skills) and less on foundational competence (knowledge). As the learners put it, “the practical work triggers the theory and we find that we are doing practical work and theory simultaneously”.
- There was a strong focus on discussion groups.
- He was relating to the learners in a more transparent manner. The learners also said that he was approachable.

I then asked the learners to compare the learning approach of the new trainer and to indicate how it related to the two systems that we had previously evaluated, namely, the GMR System and the New System. **They said that the new trainer’s approach was almost identical to the GMR System** with the exception of the assessment approach, which would be more rigorous.

There were a few issues that still concerned me. I then conducted an impromptu quasi-structured focus group (with some predetermined questions) to determine what the learners felt regarding the new trainer and his approaches and why, on the meeting of the 3rd May 2005, some of the learners had opted for the New System which had contradicted their initial concerns.

Their responses to my questions and their contributions in this structured focus group session will follow in the discussion and conclusion in the chapters to follow where I shall focus on trying to monitor the change that occurred while trying to understand and interpret the change. I will also try to see if this action research endeavour endorses the assumptions of andragogy and theory espoused in OBE. At the end, we shall be able to gauge whether there has been any contribution to the existing body of knowledge.

CHAPTER 4

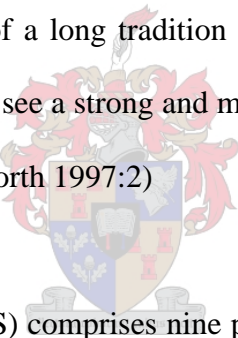
REFLECTIONS ON ACTION

In this chapter I give a brief account of the working environment. I then look to monitor the change occurring during the research process. I also try to analyse the participants' decision making. The data collection method and the limitations of our experience are discussed. Lastly I look at how the research experience supports the existing body of knowledge on adult learning and action research.

“Problems only remain problems until solutions are found”. (Anonymous)

4.1 INTRODUCTION

“Action Research can be seen as part of a long tradition among African-American, feminist, and other scholar- and grassroots activists to see a strong and mutually constitutive relationship between research and social change”. (Hollingsworth 1997:2)



The South African Police Service (SAPS) comprises nine provinces and 14 divisions. The Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) is a component within one of the divisions. The Questioned Document Unit (QDU) is a unit/section within the Forensic Science Laboratory. Historically, the FSL employed only white personnel as forensic analysts. Nowadays the FSL employs black personnel, but these are at lower levels. All the senior training positions at the FSL are occupied by white personnel. These appointments were based neither on the level of competence of a person in the field, nor on qualifications. The criteria for appointments are rather unclear. The practices of management at the FSL contribute to racial tension.

The level of frustration and anger of workers in the FSL is high. This is due to the poor practices of management at the FSL. Early in 2005 workers staged a two-day picket to express their

dissatisfaction with management. I was one of those workers who picketed. A memorandum detailing our grievances was handed to a representative of the Minister for Safety and Security. This is not the first time that labour action has been directed at management. In recent years there has been labour action on more than one occasion. All except one of the protesters were black South Africans. There was a need for social and educational change. The environment was ripe for action research that would bring change not only in the educational setting but also in the social environment.

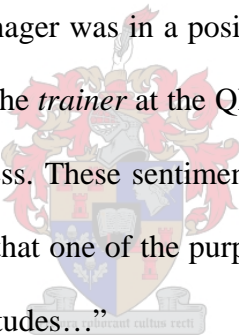
Learning practices at the FSL formed part of the dissatisfaction of employees. To express one's dissatisfaction one needs a command of language. Each field or discipline in the academic arena has its own language. Chemistry, physics and mathematics make use of specific symbols to convey a message. People unfamiliar with those symbols will not be able to communicate in that language. The field of learning also has its own language with terminology that is specific to the field. If one is not familiar with words and the meanings of terms such as "OBE", "adult learning", "contextual assessment" and others, it will be difficult to communicate in the language of learning. In the words of Hollingsworth (1997:149), "language enables participants to coordinate their actions – negotiate goals and evaluate outcomes".

The learners at the QDU had given expression to their frustration in the way learning was progressing by (i) addressing their concerns in the memorandum to the Minister of Safety and Security and (ii) lodging a grievance that eventually took the matter to the labour court. If one examines the complaints of the learners as listed during our initial contact, one can see that while we can derive meaning from their articulated concerns, their language is comparable to layman's language. Whilst the learners were able to list their concerns, they were not able to proffer solutions in the language of learning. For example, they said that "training methods need to change" but they

were not able to describe training methods. Their concerns are listed in both Chapter 3 and the reflective journal of this thesis.

If one has a solution to offer but one cannot express it for the lack of command of the language, then it becomes frustrating. It was apparent during the early part of the cycles that the learners were not conversant with the terminology of learning. This could have ended up being a limitation. In this situation I, being the facilitator, was familiar with the language of learning and so I was able to assist learners to express themselves in the language of learning.

It has been articulated in the previous chapters that the purpose of this action research process was to achieve change and understanding. I felt that for real change to happen it must start with the training manager, since the training manager was in a position of power and authority. Aside from being the training manager he was also the *trainer* at the QDU. His attitude and openness to change were pivotal to the success of the process. These sentiments are echoed by Taba (1957, quoted in Hollingsworth 1997:10) when she says that one of the purposes of action research was to “enhance the insights of teachers, to alter their attitudes...”



4.2 TRACKING CHANGE

I have said earlier that action research is about change and understanding. While one may endeavour to achieve a certain change, change cannot be guaranteed. Change requires choices and decisions from human beings and so change is dependent on whether people decide to opt for it.

The *first sign of positive change* was the willingness shown by the management of the QDU and learners to accept the use of a facilitator to engage in a process to bring about a solution. Previously,

the relationship between management and learners had been so bad that there had been no room for constructive engagement.

Whilst the learners were quite clear in what their frustrations were in terms of the way in which their learning was progressing, they were not clear in having a detailed solution to their problems. I found that the training sessions on OBE, adult learning, assessment and the other related training areas that I conducted *increased the knowledge (understanding)* of the participants. They started to understand better what they were actually asking for. The discussion on contextually-based assessment, for example, where we discussed the use of mock trials to assess knowledge as opposed to using long written tests, was positively received by the learners. The overall increase in the knowledge of OBE and adult learning by the participants was another *huge positive change* for me.

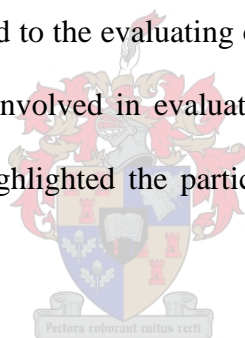
During the action research process one of the things one does is to plan one's next action or intervention based on the existing data. The participants had at one stage agreed to a certain plan of action, namely the reviewing of a unit standard in conjunction with its training programme. During one of the cycles, the plan took an unexpected turn when the learners suggested that instead of reviewing a unit standard and its corresponding training programme, we consider the GMR System that had previously been successful. I was of the opinion that the notion of training against unit standards was not a fair approach for the following reasons:

- The unit standard was just a draft (may change significantly over time) and as such did not really carry value.
- I knew that the unit standard had not been developed in consultation with the learners, as is requested by SAQA, as part of the broad and narrow consultation process and as such lacked credibility.

- We were interested in changing training methods as opposed to changing unit standards. Unit standards do not prescribe how training or assessment should proceed. The training manager was using unit standards to impose certain training and assessment methods.

I also considered the GMR System to be a suitable approach for workplace learning. This sudden change in direction by the learners indicated to me an *increased level of critical awareness* on the part of the learners. At this stage it was evident that the learners were able to understand how the GMR System and practical competence could be related. This sign of growth was *another positive change* during the process.

The training manager had up to that point shown an unwillingness to consider the GMR System. However, as a participant, he had agreed to the evaluating of the GMR System. The mere act of the training manager being willing to be involved in evaluating the GMR System was also seen as *positive change*. Again this process highlighted the participants' increasing understanding of the world of OBE and adult learning.



4.3 IN THE LIGHT OF THE POSITIVE CHANGE WHY DID SOME OF THE PARTICIPANTS DECIDE IN FAVOUR OF THE NEW SYSTEM?

In the previous chapter I reported on my feelings and perceptions regarding the decision of some of the participants to opt for the New System. When we met on 27 September 2005, I asked the learners who had chosen the New System why had they done so. Participants were encouraged to be honest and open. These were the responses I received from the learners and are quoted just as the learners responded:

- *I felt we needed a stronger theoretical background.*
- *I find it difficult to read if left on my own, the New System forced me to read.*

➤ *I felt that there would be knowledge gaps in the GMR System.*

These learners clarified their position by saying that by choosing the New System they were not saying that they had wanted a long, drawn-out learning approach but rather a better theoretical approach. They also indicated that theirs was not an unconditional acceptance of the New System, but rather that they had opted for the new system with certain conditions. I have previously mentioned these conditions.

From the reasons given by the participants it is clear that my understanding of their choice of the New System differed from the reasons that they offered. After the evaluation of the two systems, I sent in a recommendation to the training manager based on the inputs from the learners. At that stage we had completed the third cycle and I had decided that for the purposes of my thesis I would report only up to the end of the third cycle. I would not have reported on the meeting of 27 September 2005 that I had held with the learners. I have said earlier that my supervisor suggested that I meet with the learners again to reflect on the process. As a result of that suggestion we met again on 27 September 2005 and the process continued. It gave me the opportunity to learn why the learners had made the choice that they had. It was my intention to continue to meet with the group regularly to resolve their learning issues, because I was committed to change in the QDU.

In the light of their responses I now understand their choices. It can be explained in terms of relating it to adult learning. As adult learners they had never before experienced OBE in the workplace. Due to their lack of exposure, OBE and all its virtues still remained abstract theory to some of the learners. They were unwilling to risk a learning approach of which they were unsure.

4.4 WHAT WAS THE NEW TRAINER LIKE AND WHAT WAS HIS APPROACH?

After our last meeting in May 2005 the situation in the QDU worsened. The CCMA case was in July 2005. During August 2005, the learners raised the issue of replacing the trainer with another. I asked the question why the learners had suggest that the trainer be replaced. The learners indicated the following reasons for wanting the trainer to be replaced:

- The learners felt that the trainer was causing the learning process to grind to a halt.
- Transparency had become non-existent.
- There was no positive change on the part of the trainer.

With new-found knowledge and critical awareness on adult learning and OBE, the learners felt that they could argue their case for a new trainer. McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (1996, quoted in De Grandi 2004:18) suggest that “for your action to be informed you need to be proactive in exploring your own motives and values so that you are clear about why you are acting as you do”. If one considers the learners’ actions one finds the following:

- They were well informed about what is good learning practice.
- They had engaged in exploring their motives during the discussion sessions. I had said earlier that we focused on the merits of the arguments – our motives being for the improvement of practice.
- In terms of values, the learners were looking for a learning experience that was open and honest.

Kemmis (1993:3) is of the view that emancipation could be an element of action research; hence he uses the term “emancipatory action research”. What we have seen here is that the learners were not only trying to change learning practices but also to emancipate themselves from a situation which they experienced as oppressive.

Another key issue for the learners was that there was no relationship between them and the training manager, a situation that was making it very difficult for learning to proceed. Early in September 2005 a new trainer was assigned to the learners. He happened to be a black male.

I asked the learners to give me an indication of how they experienced the new trainer and his learning approach. Their responses are quoted verbatim:

- *We do a lot of practical work. Have discussion groups. We have less theory now. The new trainer has brought variety.*
- *We find that the theory is triggered by the practical.*
- *The discussion groups are alive. The system encourages us to read.*
- *This is a good system.*
- *Doing practical work and theory simultaneously works for me.* (This is from a learner who had previously opted for the New System).
- *The system is working for now. We will have to wait and see. There may be knowledge gaps.* (This is from a learner who had previously opted for the New System)
- *Must use the system to build our learning experience.* (This is from a learner who had previously opted for the New System).
- *The trainer is approachable. He is interested in establishing relationship with the learners.* (All the learners except two, who could not attend the session, were unanimous regarding this view).

I asked the learners how similar or different the new trainer's approach was to the GMR System and the New System. Their response was that the new trainer's approach was almost identical to the GMR System. Their immediate response was that it was speedy and efficient. Above all else, he was willing to engage them in discussion and was treating them with respect. They reiterated that it

was easy to establish a relationship with him. So what did the learners who had previously opted for the New System now think? They were happy with the new trainer and his learning approach. In fact, one of the learners who had previously opted for the New System was so enthused by the new trainer and his methods that he undertook on his own initiative to interview all the learners (from the group) to find out what they felt regarding the new trainer. The result was overwhelmingly positive.

In their responses the learners mention how they had experienced the use of theory and practice. In its simplest form action research is about getting participation from role-players and making decisions based on inputs from the role-players. In the case of our research process, we found that the learners wanted a seamless continuity between theory and practice.

Riding, Fowell and Levy (1995:1) support the learners' view by espousing the notion that theory and practice must be brought close together. Macmurray (1957, quoted in Reason and Torbet 2001:6-7) also argues a case for the significance of practical work. He is of the opinion that he "does" rather than "thinks". It is his view that most of our knowledge does not have theoretical objectives and that all our primary knowledge arises as an aspect of activities that do not have theoretical objectives. He maintains that it is this knowledge itself, an aspect of action, to which all reflective theory must adhere.

Heron (1996, quoted in Reason and Torbet 2001:7) argues for the consummation of knowing in practice. He goes on to say that practical knowing is the consummation, the fulfilment, of the knowledge quest.

4.5 HOW IMPORTANT IS RELATIONSHIP IN THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT?

In my very first interaction with the group in March 2005, I gleaned from their contributions that “relationship” was lacking. To address the problem I used a real-life example as a case study. The paragraph extracted from the case study by Stringer (1999:28), which focuses on the vital issue of “relationship” in the learning environment, is presented below.

Whenever I commence work with a new group of people, the words of my good friend Doug come to my mind. ‘Relationships are the key,’ he constantly reminds us... There have been times when projects have come to a grinding halt, or disappeared almost without a trace, because of the antagonisms that developed between participants...I struggle to remember the situations in which I have been able to work successfully with people toward whom I have had hostile feelings, or who have had hostile feelings toward me. As Doug says, relationships are the key!

I did not know the learners well before the action research process began. I had naturally had some measure of contact with them before the action research process began, because we all worked for the FSL. During the process I had got to know them better than I had before. I now know them by their first names. In fact, during one of the facilitation sessions I realised that one of the learners had attended a facilitation session on adult learning that I had presented in 2003. The process has given me an opportunity to establish *relationship* with them.

During the reflective session on 27 September 2005 I asked the learners if they thought that I should be involved in their learning programme with the new trainer. This was done to determine whether they had experienced me as a positive influence.

The group indicated that they were very keen to involve me, especially in their discussion sessions. They indicated that they wanted me to pass on my knowledge of adult learning, OBE and

assessment to their new trainer. They were also keen that I assist the new trainer in selecting appropriate training and assessment methods.

During my discussions with the group on 27 September 2005, the new trainer had not been present. I later met him at a management meeting (on 13 October 2005) where I was representing my commander. We had an opportunity during the lunch break to discuss training issues and he said that he had received positive responses from the group regarding my participation. He also indicated that he wanted to work closely with me.

Why was it that the learners wanted my continued involvement? I think there are two reasons: firstly, for my knowledge of adult learning and secondly, because they trusted me and were willing to continue the relationship that I had established with them. I think that they trusted me because of the respect that I had shown towards them. How had I shown them respect? I want to say that the structured focus group method of allowing participation is a powerful tool if used correctly. If used properly, it allows the participants an opportunity to express themselves freely. Participants also realise that they are not being goaded into a specific direction. This enhances their sense of freedom. For this process to be successful, one must listen and *acknowledge the participants' contributions*. I think that when we *acknowledge the participants contributions* the participants feel that they are being respected. It is well known in the andragogical assumptions of Knowles (in Knowles and Associates, 1985) that adult learners want to feel respected.

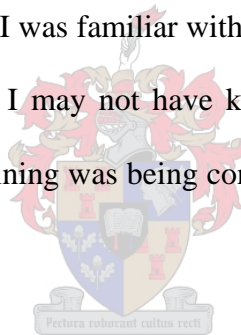
The new trainer was someone whom I had known for 10 years. Although we had worked for different sections, I had had some measure of contact with him. It was encouraging for me to receive such a positive response from him. Whitehead (2000, quoted in Mohammed 2001:51) poses the question: "How do I live my values more fully in my practice?" When the new trainer received me positively, I could only glean from his response that he had had positive experiences in his

contact with me during the previous nine or so years. I believe that it is because I live my values fully in my practice.

4.6 THE DATA COLLECTION METHOD

As a group we had decided that the best way forward was to have open discussion sessions. We chose to use the structured focus group method. The structured focus groups served to give the participants a chance to express what they were thinking in an open forum. The **data** that we gained from these sessions was used to **plan** and **act** during the **cycles**.

As the facilitator of the process I also had access to **soft data**. Having worked in the Forensic Science Laboratory for almost 10 years I was familiar with the learning practices at the FSL and the QDU. There were specific details that I may not have known about the QDU, but I did have a general idea of the manner in which training was being conducted. In other words, I understood the culture.



4.6.1 Advantages of the Structured Focus Group as we experienced it

The structured focus group is an open and transparent method and as such it has all the advantages of open and transparent methods. It gave the participants an opportunity to let the others know clearly and unambiguously where they stood on all issues that were being discussed. There was clarity on the existing practice of learning at the QDU. The sessions were open, and the structured focus groups were used as a method to give the participants a chance to express their feelings and opinions regarding how they experienced the learning and to further make suggestions. There was not much opportunity for disconfirming evidence or for offering wrong evidence. Fortunately, we did not have to dispute or argue over the correctness of information. This allowed the discussion to

revolve around discussing the merits of the arguments being advocated. This kind of approach also forces people to indicate the position that they adopt. Transparency in discussion and debate is the breeding ground for good practice. This method provides a platform for encouraging those practices.

Referring to the structured focus group, Dick (1998:2) suggests that “(e)ven in the hands of an inexperienced facilitator, however, the process will usually yield good quality information”.

4.6.2 Disadvantages of the Structured Focus Group as we experienced it

Some would argue that the Structured Focus Group does not provide security and shelter for participants who face the risk of retaliation or victimisation from other participants or influential people who have power. Insecure participants may not freely express themselves. This is true, but then one has to ask, how much pain and suffering are the participants willing to undergo to bring real change? Sometimes the only way to bring change is to openly declare one’s intentions, for instance by going to the CCMA to intervene in learning matters.

4.7 WHAT WERE THE LIMITING FACTORS DURING THE RESEARCH PROCESS AND HOW COULD THEY HAVE AFFECTED THE RESEARCH OUTCOME?

The FSL is overloaded with casework. Forensic analysts are consistently under pressure to complete casework and are measured against casework that is completed. As a result there is very little time for research and development. Spending time on activities that do not immediately increase casework statistics is frowned upon. This is the background against which we work.

As participants and co-researchers we had *limited time* to spend with each other. Each of the group sessions where we met to discuss issues and where I delivered short training sessions lasted between two and a half to three hours. I was of the opinion that if we had more time together we could have engaged in more learning on (i) OBE, (ii) adult learning, (iii) facilitation and (iv) assessment. I also think that we could have chosen an area for learning within the Questioned Document Environment and implemented all that we had discussed and proposed as a group.

Our group consisted of 10 learners, the training manager and I. When we arranged dates for our meetings we found that it was not always possible to have every participant at every session. This definitely affected the continuity of involvement of the participants. In an effort to find meeting dates that suited everyone we found that the time between meetings was longer than if everyone would have been available all the time. Kock (1997:12) states that “(i)f two or more iterations are to be carried out consecutively in the same organisation, a long gap with no ‘action’ between iterations can prevent momentum from being achieved”. Having to wait a long time before we could meet meant that we had sometimes forgotten part of what had transpired in the last session. This meant that we had to use up some of the time during sessions to refresh ourselves on what had happened previously. Another limiting factor was that we did not, as a group, have the power to make decisions and effect changes. All we could do was make recommendations and hope that the management of the QDU would support our ideas. In effect, our role as participants was limited.

One of the big disadvantages that *I* faced was that of not being given any support by my workplace commander for my involvement in research at the QDU. In fact, after my first two meetings (with the director of the QDU and the learners) I proceeded to continue with the research at the QDU in a very clandestine manner (without letting my workplace supervisor know what I was doing). To attend sessions with the participants at the QDU I would ask for time off at work, citing personal reasons. The time I had taken off would be deducted from my vacation leave. I did not want my

workplace supervisor to know that I was still involved in research at the QDU because I thought that she might try to stop me from conducting research at the QDU. I cannot go into the reasons for my concerns. That is a separate issue.

4.8 HOW DOES OUR ACTION RESEARCH EXPERIENCE SUPPORT THE EXISTING BODY OF KNOWLEDGE REGARDING ACTION RESEARCH AND ADULT LEARNING?

Below are listed some of the observations that I made during the research process:

- Adult learners endeavoured to be involved in the decision making regarding the learning process.
- Adult learners wanted the workplace learning to be more practically-oriented, that is, they showed an inclination for learning by doing. As one learner put it, “The practical triggers the theory.”
- Adult learners showed that they were critically aware. They showed an awareness of their existing learning experiences. They then challenged the existing learning experiences while exploring and suggesting alternatives.

4.8.1 Linking my observations and our experiences to the existing theory and assumptions on adult learning and showing that they support and reinforce existing theory and assumptions

“Action Research...provides a rewarding experience for researchers who want to work closely with the practitioner community. It can be used in many modes, both to generate new theory and to reinforce or contradict existing theory”.

(Baskerville 1999:20)

By asking for a system of learning where theory and practice are seamless or where “*theory is triggered by the practical*” the learners were unknowingly supporting the theory that practice and theory must necessarily be applied together and that good learning approaches are in operation when practice guides theory. They also indicated that they wanted to learn by doing. Lewin (n.d. quoted in Hollingsworth 1997:6) suggests that adults learn by doing.

In the words of Reason (2001:3), “(A)ction research aims to develop theory which is not simply abstract and descriptive but is a guide to inquiry and action in present time. A good theory arises out of practical experience, articulates qualities of practice to which we aspire, and challenges us, moment to moment in our professional and personal lives, to discover ways to realise these qualities in action.”

I mentioned earlier that the learners had shown ‘*critical awareness*’ regarding their learning experience. Mezirow and Brookfield (1983 & 1985, as quoted in Peters, Jarvis and Associates 1991:94) advocate the notion of critically aware learners. Critically aware learners have the ability to identify and challenge assumptions and are more in touch with their authentic needs than others could be. They are thus able to make a commitment to learning on the basis of having knowledge of genuine alternatives. The experience of critical awareness during our action research process has lent support to the notion of critical awareness as mentioned by Mezirow and Brookfield.

The adult learners wanted to be intimately involved in making decisions regarding the learning process. Knowles (1975, quoted in Merriam and Brockett 1997:138) suggests that adult learners take the lead in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and

evaluating learning outcomes. Again, we found support for Knowles's assumptions during our research process.

According to Suanmali (1981, quoted in Brookfield 1986:36-37) there are certain principles of adult learning that adult educators should be aware of, namely (i) help the learner to assume increased responsibility for defining, planning, and evaluating his or her own learning and (ii) emphasise experiential and participative methods with the appropriate use of modelling and learning contracts. The experience we had during our research process was that the adult learners wanted to participate in the process. This again supports the existing theory.

Towards the end of the research process we found that the learners had achieved two major outcomes, namely obtaining the services of a new trainer and implementing a system of learning with which they were comfortable and happy.

The outcome was one where the learners were happy with the result that they had achieved. This sort of awareness of achievement of an outcome is also a characteristic of adult learners and lends further support to the assumptions of Knowles who says that critically aware learners are aware of their needs.

Action research is about achieving both change and understanding. The process on which we embarked achieved both change and understanding. There were many changes (the most significant being the replacement of the trainer and the subsequent changing of training methods). I have mentioned them earlier. The achievement of that change supports and reinforces the theory on action research that achieving change through action research is possible. The gains in understanding and knowledge made by participants, both of their learning environment and learning theory, support the action research theory that it is able to achieve understanding as one of its aims.

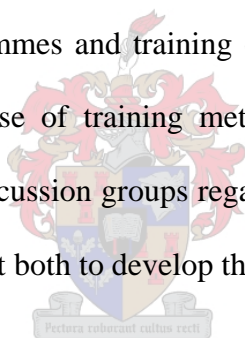
CHAPTER 5

THE OUTCOMES

In this final chapter I consider the question of where our action research process ends. I also discuss the possible value our project may have for other learners and facilitators in similar situations and then consider whether the process helped in making any gains in terms of improving practice.

5.1 WHEN DOES OUR ACTION RESEARCH PROCESS COME TO AN END?

I have mentioned in earlier chapters that I have always sought to be of assistance to members at the Forensic Science Laboratory regarding learning issues. When I worked at the Chemistry Unit I was involved in setting up learning programmes and training of new members. This included writing learning outcomes, planning on the use of training methods and determining how to conduct assessment. I have been involved in discussion groups regarding workplace learning. I have helped other sections within the Chemistry Unit both to develop their learning programmes and to facilitate them.



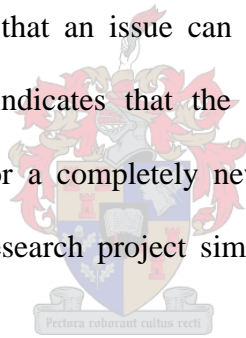
My involvement in the Questioned Document Unit was the first time I had been involved in an action research (AR) process. The aim of the AR process was always to find some kind of solution that would be beneficial to both learners and management and would show that there was an *improvement in practice*.

The reason for my involvement at the QDU was to achieve two things, namely (i) to improve practice regarding learning and (ii) to be involved in an AR process that would give me an opportunity to write an action research thesis for postgraduate study requirements.

In order to write a thesis one has to ask various questions: When does an action research process start and when does it end? Can one continue with seeking change using an action research approach after one has submitted a thesis on the process?

Action research relies heavily on the participation of people and so its direction is dependent on the decisions people make. It can happen that just as you thought that you have resolved one issue another arises which gives an opportunity for another iteration. If you have resolved issues then there is reason for terminating the action research process. Satisfying the requirement for a thesis may be different from satisfying the needs of the participants in terms of improving practice.

What if the action research approach is unsuccessful or a suitable outcome is not achieved after one or more iterations – bearing in mind that an issue can be resolved in one cycle? The lack of achievement of a suitable outcome indicates that the problem still exists and that there is opportunity for another iteration or for a completely new action research project. Nobody can guarantee the outcome of an action research project simply because it depends on choices that people make.



In our research project we were in the situation where some of the learners felt that for significant change to happen, the trainer must be removed. Only the management of the South African Police Service has the authority to do that. In that sense the group involved in action research would have been unable to effect change directly. One of the options the learners had was to exert pressure on management to effect change. This might have been in the form of labour court or strike action.

5.2 WHERE ARE WE WITHIN THE CURRENT ACTION RESEARCH PROCESS?

As long as there is human interaction there will always be a possibility of human relation problems. In that sense there is always a reason for doing action research. In terms of improving practice at the QDU we have come a long way. One main goal that we have managed to achieve is dialogue. The lack of communication between the QDU management and the learners had been a serious problem. We met as a group (learners and facilitator) on 8 November 2005 to reflect on what had happened so far. The session was a structured focus group.

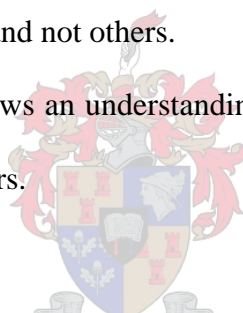
In general, the group was content with the way training was being conducted. However, some of the concerns raised by some of the learners were that there were some gaps in the theory and that in some cases learning outcomes had not been defined.

We met again as a group on 11 November 2005 to find ways of addressing the issue of theory gaps and to write learning outcomes for the learning programme. During the structured focus group session the learners came up with the following:

- A document detailing topics and areas for learning. This document had been compiled as a result of our structured focus group on the 8 November 2005. The document was not written in terms of learning outcomes. It was decided to do this on 28 November 2005.
- Ways in which to address possible theory gaps. Learners were divided on the role of the trainer in terms of meeting theory gaps. Some learners felt that they wanted to explore knowledge areas on their own and did not want to be spoon-fed, whilst others felt that the trainer should be more involved in the transfer of knowledge.

I would say that we are at the end of our action research project. All the pieces are coming together. The following are clear indicators:

- The trainer is actively building relationship with the learners. Effective communication is taking place.
- The trainer and learners are availing themselves of structured focus group sessions. These sessions form the platform for change.
- The development of the training programme is heading in the right direction. The learners are actively involved in its development and with my help it should follow an OBE approach.
- The group has come to understand that each one of them is unique, that they have different learning styles and that the training sessions that are forthcoming cannot be solely for the benefit of an individual or two or three members of the group, but rather for the whole group. This will mean that at times they will be engaged in activities that suit some and not others.
- The group definitely shows an understanding of OBE and a strong inclination to be self-directed adult learners.



Action research practitioners are of the view that action research encourages us to ask critical questions about our own practice and to find answers for ourselves. In the case of the QDU, the continued improvement in practice will depend to a large extent on whether the (present or future) trainer inquires into his/her own practice.

5.3 CAN THE BROADER LEARNING COMMUNITY GAIN FROM OUR ACTION RESEARCH?

This question has been asked many times. Can the results or findings of an action research approach be used in other settings? Action research is meant to address issues in a responsive manner. Sometimes, the response is meant to be quick. If one uses the cyclical approach of **plan, act,**

observe and **reflect** then these four stages of the cyclic method are meant to address unique questions in a unique environment. The data gathered in that environment would be used to address the situation in that environment and so the solution would be unique to that situation. The results of an action research project then, are a reflection of a unique situation.

What action research does offer the wider learning environment is a living example of how problems can be addressed using an action research approach. Others relating to an action research process may treat it as a case study and may glean ideas on how to conduct their own action research. Where action research does add to the existing body of knowledge, that new knowledge is available to all who would like to make use of it.

5.4 CONCLUSION – ACTION RESEARCH IS AN APPROACH THAT IS ALIVE AND ORGANIC



Participatory action research is about dialogue and human interaction. What I have experienced is that as long as there are willing participants that are in dialogue, there is always hope for change – change that shows an improvement in learning practice. It did not always feel like that. Even though we were in dialogue, there were times during the action research process when I wondered if we would achieve anything, especially with regard to getting the training manager to change from a content based paradigm to an outcomes based paradigm; and getting the training manager to conduct contextually-based assessment.

The process was nevertheless dynamic with interaction from each and every participant. At every moment there was the possibility of change, even if it was slight change-in terms of knowledge that participants gained. I feel that at this point we have made significant progress in terms of setting the right platform for improving practice. We have achieved this by working in an open and transparent

manner. We have maintained the dignity of the participants. We have refrained from personal accusations and disparaging remarks. I feel that the integrity of the process was maintained throughout.

What is the way forward for the learners and the new trainer at the QDU? The trainer should now develop the skill of being a learning facilitator. The new trainer and the learners need to come to a realisation that the learners, together with the trainer, must take responsibility for their learning. Accountability and ownership is the key. In this instance we have a willing group of participants. The new trainer should continue to build relationship with the learners. Relationship is the platform on which their learning experience can be built. The management of the Questioned Document Unit need to support the change process in a positive way. An immediate concrete contribution would be to expose the new trainer to a course on learning facilitation skills.

Action research can be used as a powerful tool to bring change and understanding if used with integrity and purity of purpose.



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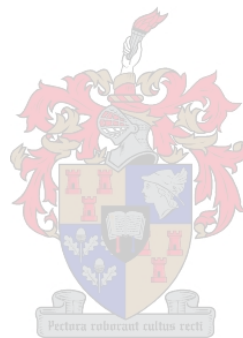
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Reflective Journal

This reflective journal is meant to portray the events that took place between February 2005 and 14 November 2005 in a factual manner and to capture my feelings and thoughts about these events. The journal was completed before and during the action research process.

25 February 2005

After much discussion and deliberation with the senior management of the South African Police Service with regard to the possibility of conducting research in the organisation I received a letter from the head of training in the police, which read, “I regret to inform you that the application by Supt. Naidoo to conduct research on self-directed learning in the SAPS at Paarl Training Institute, was not favourably considered. It is suggested that he completes his study on self-directed learning at the Forensic Science Laboratory, as it is a scarce skill environment and may benefit from such a study.”

When I read the letter I felt very discouraged. I had previously received a negative response at the Forensic Science Laboratory with regard to conducting research. I was angry with the head of training for rejecting my application and yet creating the impression that there was a possibility of doing research at the FSL.

March 2005 (Specific Date not recorded)

I met with the head of the Questioned Document Unit (QDU) to discuss the possibility of conducting research on learning in his environment. I discussed with him the use of action research, mentioning that action research was a tool that could be used to facilitate a solution to some of the learning problems experienced in this unit. The action or change part should benefit his unit and the research part would benefit me. He gave me his consent to go ahead with the research project. I indicated that I would like to meet with his training manager to discuss the research project.

On leaving, I had mixed feelings. On the one hand I felt encouraged by his positive response but I had enough experience in the Forensic Science Laboratory to know that what awaited me might be a daunting task. At that time it was difficult for employees of colour to receive cooperation from some of their white seniors. Bringing change would be no walk in the park. Nevertheless, I decided that I would proceed.

I later met with the training manager to discuss the research project. He also gave me a positive verbal response. After our discussions I hoped that we would be able to engage in a positive action research project.

18 March 2005

This was my first meeting with the training manager and learners. We met to discuss learning problems experienced at the QDU within the adult learning environment and then to find and implement solutions. It was at this meeting that I learnt that the learners were extremely aggrieved about the progress of learning and the gaining of competence. The situation was so bad that it had reached the Labour Court and was at arbitration stage. The learners expressed what they felt were problems that they experienced.

Below are some of the responses from learners. (Their full responses are on pages 32 and 33 of Chapter 3 of this thesis):

- *We want in-service training to do the job. Training methods need to change. Need more practical training and less theory.*
- *Classroom learning takes too much time. Existing theory tests are too long and take too much time.*

- *Want inclusive approach. All role-players must be involved. Want discussion sessions.*
- *Want the learning approach that worked with other successful learners.*
- *Must have time frames and target dates.*
- *Want to know what the embedded knowledge requirements are to begin with casework.*
- *Lack of communication. Information is withheld from us. There must be transparency and honesty.*

Something that was clear in this meeting was that there was deep mistrust between the learners and the training manager. If one considers the responses from the learners it seems that every negative practice possible in the learning arena was in operation in the QDU. This was disturbing news to me. As an employee in the Forensic Science Laboratory I was aware of the factors that were at play. The police service is an hierarchical organisation. It operates in a command and control environment. It has not shed itself of its racial baggage, and it is true to say that tensions run high and racial prejudice is rife. The QDU's senior and middle management is exclusively white. The learners are policemen who have long service and are entrenched in the practices of the police. Workers of colour cannot and should not be treated any differently from their white colleagues.

This environment provides many contradictions. The country is said to have one of the most liberal constitutions in the world with a special focus on the freedom and rights of the individual, even extending to the learning arena. The people who are in government are supposedly those that fought for this freedom. However, what is contradictory is that the public service, which these so called freedom fighters govern, lacks the freedom that is espoused in the constitution and in the legislation governing learning. Learners become victims of the government's inability to implement their own policies. This situation breeds intense frustration and consequently conflict.

It is within this paradigm that we proceeded and jointly agreed that we should have a plan of action. After some discussion we agreed on what the focus areas of the action plan should be. We thought that in addressing these issues we could conduct short information sessions/discussion groups on the following topics:

- Facilitation skills
- Self-directed learning
- Outcomes-based learning
- Ownership of learning

I left the meeting feeling that we had hatched a sufficient plan on which to act. I felt that the first meeting had given us the platform for progress, although I was aware that such deep mistrust and negative beliefs are not easily overcome.



11 April 2005

This session was attended by eight learners, the training manager and me. The aim of the session was that I would deliver some training on learning. The session was to be based on the four points mentioned above, namely facilitation skills, self-directed learning, outcomes-based learning and ownership of learning as mentioned on 18 March 2005.

I conducted a training session making use of two case studies. I elicited much discussion by using different types of questioning techniques. I encouraged participants to express their thoughts and questioned their ideas so as to crystallise ideas and concepts. This would help to get to the root cause of problems and also help to chart a way forward.

As a result of the discussion we have planned to meet again on the 18 April 2005. Here we would set about as a team to refine a learning programme, so that it is relevant within the context of OBE and Adult Learning. This appears to be the second cycle unfolding. I was somewhat pleased with the session. While the participants expressed themselves freely I could not help but feel that there was an element of inhibition.

18 April 2005

This meeting was attended by eight learners, the training manager and me. On the meeting of 11 April we had agreed to review a unit standard (I forgot to write this down in my original reflective journal and subsequent correspondence to Prof. CA Kapp) and the corresponding learning programme. The training manager was to disseminate copies of the unit standard to learners so that they could prepare for the review meeting on 18 April 2005. The aim of the session was to review a unit standard in conjunction with a learning programme. The idea was that once we had reviewed the unit standard we would then evaluate the learning programme. During an earlier meeting we had decided that the training methods of the QDU, with long lectures and long drawn-out tests and assignments, were hampering learning. The idea of reviewing the learning programme was to streamline it and make it contextual.

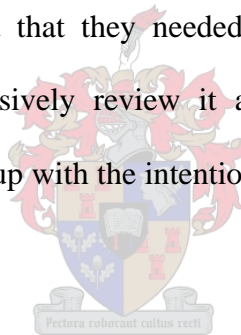
The training manager did not disseminate the unit standard to the learners as we had agreed. He did not offer any reasons as to why he had not given a copy of the unit standard to the learners.

One of the burning issues with the learners was that they wanted to focus on the gaining of practical competence. They wanted to be able to do the work. They also wanted to acquire the minimum amount of foundational competence to be able to do the work. Once they had begun working they wanted to build on their existing knowledge.

Since they had not been given copies of the unit standard in advance, the learners were at a distinct disadvantage. They had been unable to prepare for the meeting. As a result, some of the learners were of the opinion that we should abandon the meeting. I appealed to the group to proceed with the meeting even though we could not conduct a full review. We discussed how we should proceed. The meeting was of the opinion that we should use the time as a training session. They wanted me to conduct training on two aspects:

- What is a Unit Standard?
- The relationship between unit standards, learning programmes and competence.

I then conducted a 45-minute training session on unit standards. The training session included discussion. We then reviewed the unit standard “analysing handwriting”. This was not an in-depth review. The learners clearly indicated that they needed much more time to appraise the unit standard before we could comprehensively review it as a group. We once again agreed to disseminate the unit standard to the group with the intention that we meet again on 22 April 2005 at 14:00 to proceed with review.



When I realised that training manager had failed to give the learners a copy of the unit standard prior to the meeting, I felt disturbed. I knew that we were starting off on the wrong footing. His behaviour would certainly help to entrench the learners’ perception of him. I did, however, feel that the learners were willing to negotiate at least. I started to realise what Bob Dick speaks of when he uses the word “fuzzy”. In action research it seems that people’s motives and intentions are not always clear.

22 April 2005

This was the session where we discussed how to conduct our learning. I presented information and facilitated much discussion on adult learning, outcomes-based education and training and assessment.

As a group we discussed these aspects and felt that the following must happen:

- We must review the unit standard (this was agreed on in a previous group meeting).
- We must review the learning material (this was agreed on in a previous group discussion).
- We must look at ways of reducing the content of the programme. The learners must learn on-the-job skills and must have sufficient knowledge to do the job. We must consider the advantages and disadvantages of a long training programme.
- Should we go the route of a shortened training programme, and later address any knowledge gaps that we become aware of?
- Discuss the impact of a shortened training programme. Consider advantages and disadvantages.
- We must look at the issues of transparency – advantages and disadvantages.

However, the training manager's lack of contribution and his body language seemed to suggest that he did not fully support the ideas mentioned above. There were some learners who also felt that while the above-mentioned points were good, there were other key issues that we were missing. When asked to elaborate, the learners suggested that we describe the elements of the two learning approaches that could be used by the QDU. They indicated that a previous group of learners had successfully completed in-house training and had commenced doing casework by being exposed to a totally different training approach. They countered that that approach had been more practically oriented with much personal interaction with the trainer. Since it had proved to be successful, they wanted to be trained by using that approach. The training manager was of the opinion that we use the new training approach.

We called the previous learning approach the GMR System, with G, M and R being the first letters of the names of the successful learners. The learning approach currently being advocated by the

training manager we called the New System. Suddenly we were at a stalemate. We then decided to list the advantages and disadvantages of each approach. Having done that we agreed we would go away and mull over the two systems and when we returned on the 3 May 2005 we would evaluate the two systems.

3 May 2005.

The training manager decided that he would sit out this session. He explained to me that he did not want to attend that session because the learners might use whatever he said in a labour court case in which they were embroiled. Before proceeding to evaluate the two systems we once again had a short discussion on adult learning, outcomes-based education and training and assessment. I facilitated much discussion about the need for training methods and assessment to be contextual.

Some of the points highlighted by members once again were as follows:

- Learners must be taken off duties that hinder training.
- As part of training, learners must do casework that enhances practical competence.
- Write contextual tests.
- Commitment from *both* parties will make the system work.
- Clearly defined time frames. Times/dates at which activities will occur.
- Constant and clear communication.
- Each learner must be given the opportunity to proceed at his own pace – all within reason.

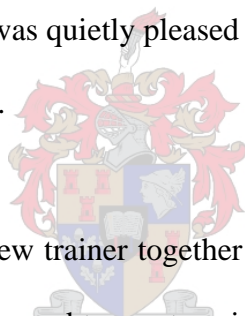
The session was highly fruitful in that the learners clearly indicated their preferences. However, I was disturbed by the change in the demands of the learners. They seemed to be willing to compromise. I do not feel that there should be compromises. Things are either right or wrong and I choose accordingly. To compromise is to dilute the truth. My dilemma is to accept that there are people who compromise. While I do not like what they do, I have no right to dislike them.

The reasons for the gap between May 2005 and September 2005 are summarised as follows:

- I had considered that the research process should discontinue in May 2005. During July 2005 Prof. CA Kapp, with good reasons, convinced me otherwise.
- The learners at the Questioned Document Unit had reached a critical stage in their labour court case.
- A new trainer had only been assigned to the learners at the beginning of September 2005.

27 September 2005

The session on 27 September 2005 was attended by six learners. At this meeting I learned that the trainer had been replaced with a new trainer. The new trainer was someone with whom I had had some contact in the past and he struck me as a pleasant person. The learners seemed pleased with him, which was an encouraging sign. I was quietly pleased that the QDU was giving someone else a chance to facilitate learning in their unit.



I was looking forward to meeting the new trainer together with the learners to discuss the learning issues that had been in contention. We agreed to meet again soon – no date was set. I had offered to contact the new trainer with regard to the date.

8 November 2005

The session was attended by the new trainer and learners. The environment was open and non-threatening. The issue of theory gaps was explored. The learners felt that OBE was progressing well. The meeting was a positive one with learners showing intent to work closely with the new trainer. The new trainer came across as someone who was willing to allow the learners to participate and be involved in the decision making regarding their learning. I was pleased with the attitude of both the learners and the trainer.

11 November 2005

This session was attended by the learners only. We discussed the following:

- Ways to address theory gaps
- Roles and responsibilities of the new trainer
- Preparation of a new training schedule.

This was a positive meeting. The learners still show a willingness to differ with each other. They nevertheless gave some input on how the issues mentioned above could be addressed.

14 November 2005

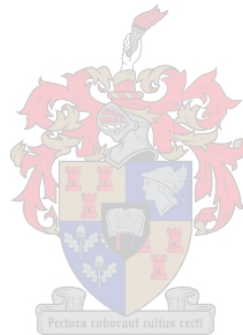
This was our last session as part of the research (thesis) process. I will still be involved as a participant to try and bring about positive change. Here we discussed assessment and learning outcomes. We decided to refine the learning outcomes so that it could be used for assessment.

This was an emotionally draining session as most of the learners felt that the outcomes should be developed by the trainer and then they would meet and just comment on them. I tried to convince them to be involved in determining learning outcomes from the beginning. This, I told them, was the kind of participation that would really enhance their learning.

After much discussion the learners agreed to be involved in developing the learning outcomes. We agreed to meet on the 28 November 2005 to review the learning outcomes. This, in the end, was a fruitful session for me.

APPENDIX A

**LETTER FROM THE DIVISIONAL COMMISSIONER AT DIVISION:
TRAINING REJECTING MY APPLICATION TO DO TRAINING**



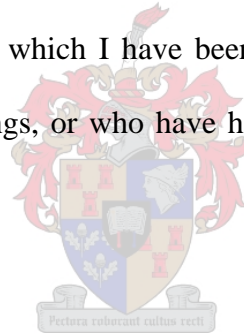


APPENDIX B

CASE STUDIES 1 AND 2

CASE STUDY 1

Whenever I commence work with a new group of people, the words of my good friend Doug come to mind. “Relationships are the key,” he constantly reminds us. I have had many opportunities to witness the wisdom encompassed in that small phrase. There have been times when projects have come to a grinding halt, or disappeared almost without a trace, because of the antagonisms that have developed between participants. Although I have experienced many situations in which I have been able to maintain productive relationships with people with whom, quite frankly, I did not like, I struggle to remember the situations in which I have been able to work successfully with people toward whom I have had hostile feelings, or who have had hostile feelings toward me. As Doug says, relationships are the key!



CASE STUDY 2

I recently reviewed a university course with class participants. A briefing by the instructor provided me with a basic understanding of the major parameters of the course. I also read the course outline and scanned notes that had been provided to students (preliminary work). I then met with the class and had participants describe how the class had operated, asking probing questions to elicit more and more detail. As they talked, I summarized their descriptions, using phrases drawn from their own words, and checked to ensure their appropriateness (description).

I then divided the class members into small groups and asked each group to create a list of those facets for the course the group members had enjoyed and/or found most productive and a separate

list of those aspects of the course that were problematic for them or had caused them some concern. The small groups provided safe contexts that enabled the students to express themselves freely, without fear that they might individually incur the displeasure of the instructor. I asked the groups to mark with asterisks those features of the course they had listed about which there was common concern; individual concerns were listed but unmarked.

As the groups presented their lists to the whole class, I asked questions that enabled individuals to express their ideas more fully, to explain particular words and phrases in fuller terms, and to clarify their meanings. This process also provided a context in which participants could understand, through discussion and an exchange of viewpoints, the different experience of each member of the class. These shared ideas revealed ways in which individuals could improve the quality of their participation in the class as well as ways in which the problematic features of the class might be remedied (interpretation).

As the students worked, a discernible sense of “togetherness” developed, enhancing the collaborative processes that participants had highlighted as one of the most positive aspects of the course.

In the final phase of the process, I withdrew from active involvement and watched as the instructor worked with the other participants to modify the programme for the final weeks of the course. They then mapped out a plan of activities that built on the strengths of the course that had been listed as concerns (planning). Much of this process was relatively straightforward because the solutions largely had been suggested during the previous discussion. Participants had only to formalize procedures and incorporate them in a systematic, planned course of action.

APPENDIX C

ONE OF THE DRAFT UNIT STANDARDS THAT WE WERE EXPOSED TO:

WRITING INSTRUMENTS AND INKS

SOUTH AFRICAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

UNIT STANDARD TITLE: **Writing Instruments and Inks**

REFERENCE NUMBER:

LEVEL: **5**

CREDITS: **8**

**LAW, MILITARY SCIENCE AND SECURITY
SAFETY IN SOCIETY**

ISSUE DATE

REVIEW DATE

PURPOSE OF THE UNIT STANDARD

This unit is for learners in the field of forensic science dealing with analysing handwriting for the purpose of identification that revolves around the general nature and appearance of as well as untenables in a document and the value of rendering proof.

A person credited with this unit standard will be able to:

- Ø Explain the development of handwriting
- Ø Explain the handwriting in South Africa
- Ø List the handwriting characteristics
- Ø Explain variation of handwriting
- Ø Explain disguised (distorted) handwriting
- Ø Apply individualisation - theory and practice
- Ø Apply the principle proof of negativity

This unit standard will contribute to the full development of any learner within the safety in society environment and more especially within the forensic science (policing) environment by providing recognition, further mobility and transportability within the field. The skills, knowledge and understanding demonstrated within this unit standard are essential for social and economic transformation and upliftment within the safety in society environment.

LEARNING ASSUME TO BE IN PLACE:

The following knowledge, skills and attitudes and / or equivalent:

.
.
.

RANGE STATEMENT

This unit standard applies to persons in the forensic science field (questioned documents) with a level of authority that will allow them to take decisions independently.

SPECIFIC OUTCOME 1

Explain the development of handwriting

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

- 3 The history and development of the origin of hand writing and changes to writing forms are explained according to the origin of hand writing
- 4 The history of print writing is identified and explained according to the origin of the print writing
- 5 The history of cursive writing is identified and explained according to the origin of cursive writing
- 6 The tendency to connect letters and words and to write with slopes to the right is identified and explained according to the history of handwriting

SPECIFIC OUTCOME 2

Explain the handwriting in South Africa

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

- 2.1 A system of writing is defined according to questioned documents principles
- 2.2 The origin of handwriting in South Africa is identified and explained according to the history of handwriting
- 2.3 The systems of writing generally used in South Africa are identified and explained according to the history of handwriting in South Africa

SPECIFIC OUTCOME 3

List the handwriting characteristics

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

- 3.1 Handwriting as an end product is explained according to the history of handwriting
- 3.2 The characteristics of handwriting are listed according to the history of handwriting
- 3.3 The design of letters fundamental to a writing system is explained and identified according to the writing system
- 3.4 The combination factors of handwriting are identified, listed and explained according to the handwriting factors
- 3.5 The relationship between line quality, movement and rhythm is identified according to the relationship between these concepts
- 3.6 The following characteristics of handwriting are explained according to the nature of the characteristic;

Note:

- Design
 - Line quality
 - Rhythm
 - Movement
 - Movement of the finger
 - Movement of the hand
 - Movement of the forearm
 - Whole arm movement
 - Writing instruments
 - Tremor
 - Illiteracy
 - Self-consciousness
 - Tremors as a result of illness or advanced age
- 3.7 The relationship between the penpoint and the paper are identified and explained according to these relationship principles
 - 3.8 The different pressures on the pen are explained according to the pressure's principles
- Note;
- The writing surface

-Writing instruments

-Speed

- 3.9 The shading of handwriting is explained according to the shading principles
- 3.10 The arrangement of writing is explained according to this principle
- 3.11 The size and ratio of sizes in writing are identified and explained according to this principle
- 3.12 The spacing of writing is identified and explained according to their size
- 3.13 The slope of writing is identified and explained according to their slope
- 3.14 The alignment of writing is identified and explained according to the principle
- 3.15 The initial, connecting and terminal strokes are identified and explained according to the principle
- 3.16 The lifting of the pen is identified and explained according to the principle
- 3.17 Punctuation and placing of diacritical marks are identified and explained according to this principle
- 3.18 Ornamental strokes are identified and explained according to this principle

SPECIFIC OUTCOME 4

Explain variation of handwriting

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

- 4.1 The term variation of handwriting is explained according to questioned document principles
- 4.2 The nature and extent of variation are determined and applied according to the nature of the handwriting
- 4.3 The factors which may influence variation are identified during the analysing of handwriting
- 4.4 The following aspects are identified and the principles thereof are applied during the analysing of handwriting

NOTE;

- Position of writing
- Writing instruments
- Carefulness in carrying out writing
- Drunkenness
- State of health



SPECIFIC OUTCOME 5

Explain disguised (distorted) handwriting

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

- 5.1 The concept disguised (distorted) handwriting is explained according to the questioned documents principles
- 5.2 The characteristics of disguised writing (distorted writing) are identified and applied during the analysing of handwriting
- 5.3 The favourite methods of disguised are identified and applied during the analysing of handwriting

NOTE:

- Change of slope
- Design of letters
- Pretension of illiteracy
- Changing the writing instrument
- Using print hand instead of cursive writing

SPECIFIC OUTCOME 6

Apply individualisation – theory and practice

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

- 6.1 The product of handwriting is explained according to questioned documents principles

- 6.2 The process of preliminary examinations is followed during the analysing of handwriting
- 6.2 The aspects to keep in mind when all letters have been examined are listed, explained and apply during the analysing of handwriting
- 6.3 The process of comparison for similarities and differences is applied during the analysing of handwriting
- 6.4 The possibility of incidental similarities is identified during the analysing of handwriting
- 6.5 The possibility of imitation to reproduce is applied during the analysing of handwriting
- 6.6 Subjectivity is minimized during the analysing of handwriting
- 6.7 The three principles in the identification of handwriting are applied during the analysing of handwriting
- 6.8 The basic principles of individualization of handwriting are applied during the analysing of handwriting

NOTE:

- Individual characteristic
- Mental habits
- Physical habits
- Qualified opinions
- Differences in handwriting
- Similarities found together with differences
- Identification of signatures
- Complex handwriting examinations
- Inconsistent comparison standards
- Complicated cases
- Multiple suspects
- Writing on copied documents
- Foreign writing

**SPECIFIC OUTCOME 7**

Apply the principle proof of negativity.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

- 7.1 The principles of comparing two writers' / authors' writing are explained and applied during the comparison of the handwriting
- 7.2 The aspects to keep in mind in the comparing differences are applied during the comparison of the handwriting
- 7.3 The principles to keep in mind in the comparing of handwriting by one writer / author are applied during the analysing of handwriting.
- 7.4 The scientific examination process during the analysing of handwriting is applied during the comparison of handwriting by one or more writers / authors.

ACCREDITATION AND MODERATION OPTIONS:

1. Anyone assessing a learner against this unit standard must be registered as an assessor with the relevant ETQA.
2. Any institution offering learning that will enable achievement of this unit standard must be accredited as a provider through the relevant ETQA by SAQA.
3. Moderation of assessment will be overseen by the relevant ETQA according to the moderation guidelines in the relevant qualification and the agreed ETQA procedures.

The standard describes competent performance in doing physical techniques that will enhance their job performance, and lay down the criteria by which competence should be judged, as well as the range of circumstances in which competence should be demonstrated.

Integrated assessment methods and tools will allow the candidate to demonstrate that she/ he has acquired knowledge of and can safely and effectively apply competence identified in this unit standard.

These tools include the following:

- _ In-site (on-the-job) observations
- _ Role-play simulations
- _ Structured group discussions
- _ Written reports (e.g., tests, exams, case studies, projects, registers, logbooks, workbooks)
- _ Verbal report backs (presentations)
- _ Portfolios of evidence
- _ Projects (physical visits to Government Departments)
- _ Experiential learning
- _ Working in teams
- _ Scenario sketching

These methods must be carefully selected based on the purpose of the assessment (for example, the written method of assessing knowledge or on-job demonstration of practical competence). The assessment must integrate a number of different methods in order to give the assessor reliable and valid proof of competence and evidence of required attitudes.

REQUIREMENTS OF A PORTFOLIO

Valid, reliable and authentic evidence (presented as a portfolio of evidence) from past achievements and experience, which serves to supplement the assessment of, applied competence.

The portfolio may include inter alia:

- _ Written statements from persons (e.g. a current and/or previous employer, colleagues, peers, manager, external customers) confirming competence of the learner
- _ Relevant certificates or awards
- _ Previous assessment records
- _ Journals/logbook.

Level

A learning programme leading to the award of this unit standard should develop learners who demonstrate:

- A foundational knowledge base as indicated in the embedded knowledge component
- An understanding of the discipline/field's fundamental terms, rules, concepts and principles
- Familiarity with some of the essential procedures, operations and techniques of this field
- An ability to use a range of procedures to solve routine problems
- Basic information gathering, analysis and presentation skills
- An ability to communicate and present information clearly and reliably following prescribed formats and conventions.

NOTES:

1. CRITICAL CROSS-FIELD OUTCOMES

The following critical outcomes are addressed in this unit standard:

- A. Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information related to forensic science in the field of questioned documents
- B. Work effectively with others related to forensic science in the field of questioned documents
- C. Understand the world as a set of related systems related to forensic science in the field of questioned documents
- D. Organise oneself and one's activities related to forensic science in the field of questioned documents
- E. Identify and solve problems related to forensic science in the field of questioned documents
- F. Communicate effectively related to forensic science in the field of questioned documents

- G. Use resources economically and cost effective related to forensic science in the field of questioned documents

2. ESSENTIAL EMBEDDED KNOWLEDGE

- X Basic understanding of all aspects related to forensic science in the field of questioned documents
- X A broad understanding of related to forensic science in the field of questioned documents.

3. SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

SPECIFIED REQUIREMENTS

Specified requirements include legal and legislative specific requirements and are contained in one or more of the following documents:

LEGAL

.....

Specifications, agreements and policies and procedures

.....



CREDITS

Total hours required by the learner to achieve the required outcomes:

Activity	Hours
Classroom learning	24
On-the-job learning	30
Self directed learning	20
Coaching required	06
Other	00
TOTAL	80

CREDITS ACHIEVED: 8

APPENDIX D

ATTENDANCE LIST AT SOME OF OUR STRUCTURED FOCUS GROUPS







APPENDIX E

MEMORANDA AND E-MAILS TO THE UNIT COMMANDER, TRAINING MANAGER AND LEARNERS AT THE QDU

MEMORANDUM

To: Dir. Hattingh, Marius Rehder and Learner Participants
From: Jason
Date: March 15, 2005
Subject: Researching Learning and Looking at Ways to Improve Learning in the Questioned Document Unit

Colleagues, a brief overview of this project and a suggested agenda for a meeting on 17-03-2005:

I am an MPhil. Education and Training for Lifelong student at the University of Stellenbosch. I am currently doing an inquiry in Self-Directed Learning (SDL) using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) paradigm. The planned action (with all participants contributing is meant to bring about change) and the research component is meant to generate a body of knowledge. .

I would like to schedule a meeting with all the role-players.

Venue: FSL: Arcadia

Date: 17-03-2005

Time: 14H00

The *aim* of the meeting would be to discuss *learning issues* and any problems arising regarding learning progress. I would like the meeting to focus on learning issues. I would like to steer away from personal attacks and accusations.

At the end of the meeting I would like us to come up with a plan of action to resolve problems within a learning paradigm. I would facilitate our attempt at realising the plan.

Hoping that we will be able to work well together and requesting that this communiqué be distributed to all participants.

Kind regards

Jason Naidoo

Meeting of Action Research Participants on 18/03/2005

To: Dir. Hattingh, All Learners, and Marius Rehder

On 18 March 2005 eight adult learners of the Questioned Document Unit, the training manager of the Questioned Document Unit and I met to discuss problems experienced at the QDU within the adult learning environment and then to find and implement solutions.

The Questioned Document Unit has members who are aggrieved about the progress of learning and the gaining of competence. Members need to successfully complete the training programmes before they are allowed to commence with casework. Their grievances are currently being handled by their workplace Union. It is in the arbitration phase.

My mandate or terms of reference is that I focus on learning issues and that I do not dwell on other human relations issues. This will be difficult for me to maintain as these issues tend to be inextricably linked. I will nevertheless commit myself to:

- being sensitive to all parties;
- maintaining neutrality;
- refraining from discussions involving individuals; and
- refraining from entertaining accusations.

During the meeting the members were given an opportunity to express their thoughts regarding the progress of their learning within the QDU. They expressed their thoughts in terms of what they experienced as barriers to learning and what they thought needed to be done. Below are their responses.

- Politics cannot be divorced from learning;
- We want in-service training to do the job;
- Training methods need to change. We need more practical training and less theory;
- We want the best way of transferring skills: the 'how' part of it;
- Mock trials should not be used to demean learners;
- Mentors and other trainers should be brought into the process of change that we are considering implementing;
- Classroom learning takes too much time;
- Existing theory tests are too long and take too much time;
- There must be transparency and honesty;
- Training methods hamper learning. Learning areas tend to change all the time. No continuity. Lost interest;
- Classroom learning is not effective. Learners must be treated as individuals. Each learner learns at a different pace;

- We want discussion sessions. Want all information regarding training; we want an inclusive approach. All role-players must be involved;
- We want the learning approach that worked with other successful learners. There is a suspicion that others learners were favoured;
- We must have time frames and target dates;
- We want critical learning, that is, learning that is needed to commence casework;
- We want time frames and target dates for action plans;
- We want to know what the embedded knowledge requirements are to begin with casework;
- There is a lack of communication. Information is withheld from us;
- Some of the learners were not cooperative. (This contribution was made by the training manager.)

We thought that in addressing these issues we could conduct short information sessions/discussion groups on the following topics:

- facilitation skills;
- self-directed learning;
- outcomes-based learning;
- ownership of learning; and
- assessment.

We will use the action research paradigm and the participatory methodology. This will be done using the cyclic approach of **plan, act, observe, reflect**.

We have agreed to meet on 11 April 2005. I suggest 11:00 as a meeting time. Please peruse document and let me know before-hand what we should do on 11 April 2005.

Thank you

Jason Naidoo



Date: 2005/05/25
To: Question Document Learners, Marius Rehder
Cc: Dir. Hattingh
From: Jason Naidoo
RE: Report on Discussion and Planning Sessions on Learning in the
Questioned Document Unit

Session 22 April 2005

This was the session where we discussed how to approach conducting our learning. I presented information and facilitated much discussion on adult learning, outcomes-based education and training and assessment. While we initially planned to review a unit standard and consider how it will affect the learning programme the meeting took a totally different turn.

The learners suggested that we describe the elements of two learning approaches/experiences viz. the one that had been successful with a previous group of learners. This learning approach we named the GMR system with G, M and R being the first letters of the names of the learners. The other learning approach we called the New System.

We proceeded to list the advantages and disadvantages of each system. We then agreed that we would go away and think about the two systems and when we next met we would then evaluate each system. We agreed to meet at 14:00 on 3 May 2005.

Session 3 May 2005.

The training manager decided that he would sit out this session. Before we proceeded to evaluate the two systems we once again had a short discussion on adult learning, outcomes-based education and training and assessment. I facilitated much discussion about the need for training methods and assessment to be contextual.

We then opened the discussion to see what the learners were more comfortable with. We proceeded to evaluate each system. During the discussion we found that there were people who opted for the GMR system (they were in the minority) and those that opted for the new system (they were in the majority).

A key ingredient of adult learning is consultation and agreement. This is done to meet learners' needs. We do this because we acknowledge that each adult learner is unique and learning styles tend to differ. So, we create an environment that is non-threatening for learners. We use training and assessment techniques that are conducive to learning. This is highly suitable for small groups.

Adult learning is propelled by a relationship that is based on honesty and transparency. We have spent much time on discussion and consultation. This was done in an attempt to create an environment where issues could be openly discussed. We have reached a kind of agreement that the

old system is suited for some of the learners and that the new system is suited to the remaining learners in the learner group.

I **recommend** that both systems be used. The learner group should be divided into two groups and each group should be exposed to the system that works well for them. Assessment should be designed accordingly so that learners would have a clear indication if they have mastered the outcomes. The emphasis should be on assessment that is contextual. All these should be done considering the principles of adult learning within the context of OBE.

For the group using the old system their competence could be measured in the same way it was done for G, M and R. For the group using the new system, we have to have well designed assessment that measures competence.

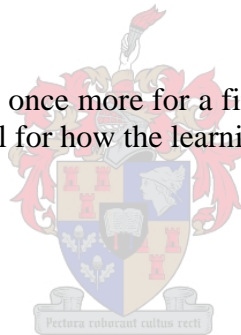
The overriding consideration of both learners and facilitator should be to establish a relationship based on trust. Do not see a concession as being defeat but rather a building block to cooperation and teamwork.

Learners must take ownership of learning but it can only be done if the product is theirs.

Thank you

Jason Naidoo

NB. I would like to meet with you guys once more for a final session where we could round up our discussion. I would also like to get a feel for how the learning has proceeded so far.







Khelawanlall Pravesh – Superintendent

To: Marius Rehder – Senior Superintendent
Subject: Action Research: Learning in the Questioned Document Unit

Marius

I thought that for the meeting on 11 April 2005 at 14:00 I would like to conduct a case study on learning for approximately one hour. I thought that this help get the ball rolling by stimulating discussion on a way forward.

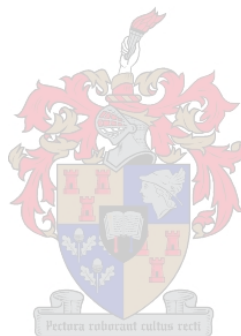
Please respond to me at my home email address:

unschooler@tiscali.co.za

Thank you

Jason

30/3/2005



Att. Prof. CA Kapp

From: Jason Naidoo – MPhil

Planning and Intervention Session on 11/04/2005 – Brief Summary

On 11/04/2005 I met with the group as decided on 18 March 2005. The aim of the session was for me the facilitator to deliver some training on learning. This was an open-ended request in that I could deliver whatever training I wanted to but it should be aimed at addressing the problems highlighted by the participants at the meeting on the 18 March 2005.

I conducted a training session using case studies encompassing discussion. I also used different types of questioning techniques-especially probe type questions to crystallise ideas and to get to the root cause of problems and also to charter a way forward. We have set up our next plan we are in the process of action, again. We will meet again on 18/04/2005.

Here we will set about, as a team, to refine a learning programme, so that it is relevant within the context of OBE and adult learning. This is the second cycle unfolding.

I will keep you posted.

Jason Naidoo



APPENDIX F

ROUGH NOTES TAKEN AT STRUCTURED FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS

Meeting: 18 April 2005

Attended by 8 learners, Marius Rehder and Jason Naidoo.

On the meeting of the 11 April we had agreed to review a unit standard and the corresponding learning programme. S/Supt. Rehder was to disseminate copies of the unit standard to learners so that they could prepare for the review meeting on the 18 April 2005. The aim of the session was to review a unit standard. The idea was that once we had reviewed the unit standard we would then evaluate the learning programme. During an earlier meeting we had decided that the training methods of the QDU, with long lectures and long drawn out tests and assignments were hampering learning. The idea of reviewing the learning programme was to streamline it and make it contextual. S/Supt. Rehder did not forward the unit standard to the learners. He did not offer any explanations as to why he did not give the learners a copy of the unit standard.

The learners had indicated that they had wanted to focus more on the gaining of practical competence-for the purposes of beginning to do the work. They just wanted to acquire the minimum knowledge requirements to commence casework. Thereafter they would focus on acquiring more foundational competence.

As a result of not having been previously given copies of the unit standard the learners were at a distinct disadvantage. They were not prepared for the meeting. I appealed to the group to proceed with the meeting. We realised that we could not conduct a full review.

I then asked the group if they wanted me to conduct some kind of training session on:

– What is a unit standard?

– The relationship between unit standards, learning programmes and competence required to conduct work.

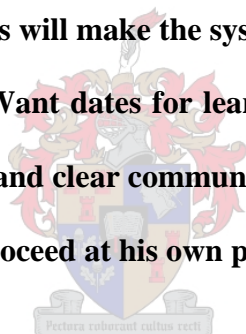
I conducted a 45-min training session on unit standards. We had some stimulated discussion on unit standards. We then reviewed the existing unit standard on "analysing handwriting". This was not a review of depth. The learners indicated that they needed much more time to appraise the unit standard before we could review it as a group. We agreed to disseminate the unit standard to the group with the intention that we meet again the 22 April at 14:00 to proceed with the review.

Notes taken at a Structured Focus Group session on 3 May 2005

Attendance List: Emily Mochitele, Timothy Dooka, Mighty Mabule, Alton Makhado, Vincent Napo, Patrick Daku.

Rough notes taken during Structured Focus Group session:

- **Learners must be taken off casework.**
- **Do “destruction cases” to gain competence.**
- **Write contextual tests.**
- **Majority of the group prefer the New System. Pulelo, Flora, Lorraine and Lebo are not at the meeting. Group indicates that they would most likely opt for the GMR System.**
- **Commitment from both parties will make the system work.**
- **Want clear-cut time frames. Want dates for learning and assessment. Times at which activities will occur. Constant and clear communication.**
- **Each learner must progress/proceed at his own pace.**



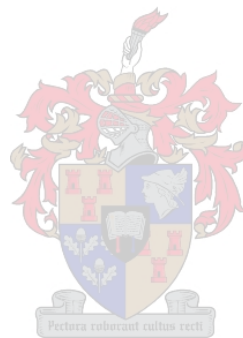
Notes taken at a Structured Focus Group session on 27 September 2005

Attendance List: Mighty Mabule, Alton Makhado, Vincent Napo, Lorraine Masha, Lebogang Mothlanthe and Flora Mamashela

Rough notes taken during Structured Focus Group session:

- **Mashabela is the new trainer.**
- **Mashabela to show commitment.**
- **Things got worse after our last session. Came to work but nothing to do. Certain individuals that were being “trained”.**
- **Arbitration was in July. Did not know what was going on.**
- **Learners raised issues in August. Mashabela arrived in early September.**
- **Do a lot of practical now. We have discussion groups. We have less theory now.**
- **Has brought variety.**
- **Assessment will include-external moderator, internal assessor, facilitator, learner and representative from Division: Training.**
- **Some learners feel that they need a stronger theoretical background.**
- **GMR system was speedy and efficient.**
- **Theory is triggered by practical.**
- **System encourages you to read.**
- **Discussion groups alive.**
- **Current one (with Mashabela) is a good system.**
- **The “New System” forced people to read – according to one learner.**
- **Doing the practical and theory simultaneously works for me.**
- **Mashabela’s system is working for now.**
- **There will be knowledge gaps in Mashabela’s system.**

- **One learner has decided that the group must work towards building a learning culture. On his own initiative he gathered data from other learners on how they experienced learning under Mashabela.**



Notes taken at a Structured Focus Group session on 8 November 2005

Attendance List: Vincent Napo, Patrick Daku, Lebogang Mothlanthe, Lawrence Mashabela, Pulelo Ndala, Lorraine Masha, Flora Mamashela and Emily Mochitele

Some important points raised during discussion:

- **Theory gaps – must have standards and guidelines.**
- **Use flow charts. Monitor progress.**
- **Have fear that there will be knowledge gaps.**
- **Facilitate question and answer session.**
- **Some learners feel that we are doing OBE in a pure form.**
- **Comment by learner. “Environment is non-threatening.”**
- **Learners must take initiative to plug learning gaps.**



Notes taken at a Structured Focus Group session on 11 November 2005

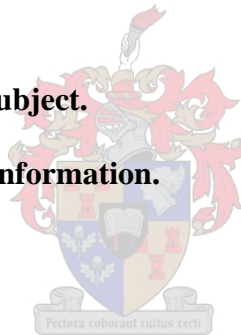
Attendance List: Alton Makhado, Emily Mochitele, Timothy Dooka, Vincent Napo, Mighty Mabule, Lorraine Masha and Lebogang Mothlanthe

Some points of discussion:

- **Programme/Schedule-What is going to happen.**
- **Knowledge transfer-not sufficient.**
- **Trainer must intervene during discussions to give direction.**
- **Trainer must be clear and decisive.**
- **Trainer must be firm and in charge of situation.**

Some solutions to theory gaps:

- **Get more information on the subject.**
- **Expose learners to additional information.**
- **Have more content matter.**



Notes taken at a Structured Focus Group session on 14 November 2005

Aim of Meeting: Write learning outcomes for training programme. This is so that we have outcomes against which we can design assessment criteria.

Attendance List: Vincent Napo, Emily Mochitele, Alton Makhado, Patrick Daku, Timothy Dooka, Mighty Mabule, Lebogang Mothlanthe, Flora Mamashela and Lawrence Mashabela (new trainer).

Group 1: Vincent and Timothy (write outcomes for handwriting)

Team Leader: Vincent

Group 2: Alton, Flora and Mighty (write outcomes for signatures)

Team Leader: Flora

Group 3: Emily, Patrick, Pulelo and Lorraine (write outcomes for alterations, erasures and typewriters)

Team Leader: Patrick

Group 4: Lawrence and Lebo (write outcomes for writing instruments)

Team Leader: Not decided

Report back on 28 November 2005 if we are available