

# Action Research Reflections

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Article referenced:

*Maureen Jenkins, "Action Learning"*

Maureen Jenkins wrote the article "Action Learning" in an effort to expound on the benefits of action learning. Her model is focused solely on problems that have no clear answer. Action learning does this by organizing together a small group of motivated individuals for regular strategy meetings. The goal of the group's meetings is to unite the efforts of the collective so as to gain fresh perspectives on the problem at hand. Action learning is described as an inspiring method that can unite the efforts and ingenuity of a small group.

The group meets its goals through a continuously spiraling process of action and refinement. Its meetings discuss prior actions and plan future activities. Fresh perspectives are attained through a non-threatening and open group forum. Jenkins asserts that at the conclusion of the action learning process new solutions and attitudes will have entered the participants' minds.

Action research is the obvious foundation of action learning, as the core principles are the same. Action research upholds the value of direct constituency involvement and action learning supports this idea as well. Both strategies feature a continuously evolving strategy based upon some measure of trial-and-error. The approaches are similar in their dynamic approach. The parallels are clear and strong between action learning and action research.

These parallels are clear to me in particular since my action research for CCT 693 became almost a mirror image of action learning. The goal of my action research project was to promote the beneficial effects that diversity can offer in CCT's classes. My group quickly realized that in order to promote such a concept as diversity we needed to get into the minds of the professors. After interviews and/or questionnaires with the respective professors from a sample of classes, my group noticed differences of opinion in how to approach diversity in classrooms. All professors had a strong positive image of diversity, but disagreed on the precise benefits it provided. They also didn't have a cohesive strategy to promote more diversity within the classroom. So my group developed a proposal that could be capable of unifying the professors' different approaches. We chose to present a bi-monthly dialogue that all CCT professors could attend.

It is easy to see the closeness in form between my group's proposal and Jenkins' action learning model. We proposed to begin each dialogue with a Check-In and close with a Check-Out. The Check-In was the prescribed time that members would discuss what they had done recently to promote diversity in CCT. The Check-Out was when members would assign themselves new actions to promote diversity in CCT. The goal of the dialogues was to find new methods of promoting diversity in the CCT community; but, more specifically, it was to unify awareness of diversity's benefits in the minds of the faculty guiding the curriculum.

Jenkins action learning model follows a remarkably similar format. She set aside a time for reporting the results of actions planned the last meeting—just like our Check-In. She advised dedicating time to action planning—another version of our Check-Out. Jenkins also wanted as much group discussion as time allowed in order to communicate new thoughts

and ideas—something that dialogue performs very well. My group's dialogues and Jenkins' meetings resemble each other very closely.

But there are differences in my group's action research proposal from Jenkins' action learning ideas. My dialogue proposal allowed a much broader scope. Apart from the first session, the dialogue could focus on any problem concerning the CCT community. It doesn't necessarily revolve around a predetermined problem. Jenkins' model advocates staying with the original problem set.

Another significant difference lies in the amount of trust necessary within the group. My proposed dialogues are dependant on a strong sense of trust within the group's circle. Without trust, the dialogue wouldn't reach the needed depth in order to reach its potential. Jenkins' model doesn't require a high degree of trust. The discussions of an action learning meeting contain little that is personal. All efforts by the group are described as being potentially public information to superiors and secondary constituencies.

Examining the similarities and differences between my approach and Jenkins' leads me to believe that action research is a process adaptable to the constituency. Jenkins' model seems well suited for corporate/institutional business settings; whereas, my dialogue model would falter in similar situations. Given the professional distance that is common in business settings my dialogue proposal wouldn't be nearly as effective. The level of trust necessary in dialogue would rarely be present. My proposal also couldn't measure up to the accountability that Jenkins' model offers to a company's hierarchy.

Conversely, I don't think that Jenkins' model would be engaging enough in order to satisfy the goals of my action research. The primary difficulty in injecting awareness of diversity's benefits into CCT's classrooms lies in unifying the professors' perspective. There are actions professors can plan ahead of time, but diversity awareness must come from within them first. In order to effect a positive change, diversity's benefits must be ever-present in the professor's minds. Jenkins' action learning strategies wouldn't delve deep enough into the professors' psyche in order to affect classroom activity.

The most important thing in action research is to know your constituency. Had I taken a closer look into my constituency, I could have expedited my action research. I assumed that the CCT faculty was close enough to allow a high-trust situation like dialogue to be fruitful. But I never asked the professors about the state of personal trust within CCT. It is very possible that something like my proposal hasn't been enacted in the past because there *isn't* enough personal trust amongst the faculty. I never looked into the matter.

The next time I do action research I plan to involve my constituency sooner. My group spent too long in the reflection stage. We should have involved our constituency almost immediately. Had we done that, we probably would have arrived at conclusions and proposals with more efficiency. As it was, we got bogged down in details such as phrasing questions and definitions of diversity. These are items that our constituency could have easily guided us.

Overall, I feel that the action research unit was successful for me. It was frustrating at times, but that is the nature of action research: it is "messy"—it rarely can be summed up in neat reports all the time. Action research's strengths lie in the relationships created between constituency members. Without an involved constituency the research would not be worthwhile.