

Listening to faculty: Developing a research strategy in early childhood education

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Abstract:

Examining the processes of preparing college faculty to use action research in early childhood education diploma programs and lab schools is rare in the current literature. This paper describes a qualitative research study that evolved from a professional development event that included a group of faculty who taught in an early childhood education diploma program, the research administrator responsible for institutional research in a publically funded Canadian college, and an external educational consultant. Action research and narrative inquiry were used as a methodology and as a learning extension for a professional development session where the participants explored the feasibility of and ways in which action research could be incorporated into

their practice. The participants provided reflections about their thoughts and feelings, and questions related to establishing an action research agenda. The reflections were analyzed to identify themes and gain new insight about perspectives on establishing an action research agenda model within the early childhood education program. That model may also extend to the lab school. Preliminary findings indicate that there is interest in building a research agenda, and this study provides a solid foundation to do just that. This study also frames a larger question: Do similar questions and challenges exist in other colleges where building a research agenda requires faculty buy-in?

Key Words:

Action research, adult education, faculty development, narrative inquiry, experiential learning.

Introduction

Being a faculty member in college early childhood education programs is a challenging and complex role that requires continuous, active learning (Merriam et al., 2007). Faculty seek out new theories, themes, and perspectives in early childhood education and combine these with adult education theories, principles and practices. Increasingly, there is a movement within the early learning sector for children, practitioners, educators, and researchers to collectively participate in research, evaluation, decision-making and planning (Pascal & Bertran, 2009). At the same time, across Canada, there is a growing movement by college administrators to develop new applied research capabilities (Roth, et al., 2007). With these two factors at play, administrators and faculty alike are grappling with ways to start or advance a research agenda that benefits faculty, students, and ultimately the community at large.

Examining research and practice, and conducting research in the early childhood sector, have been traditionally viewed as separate entities, with much of the research being generated from educators in university environments rather than colleges. Research projects among Early Childhood Education faculty and lab school staff in the college system have been absent or sparse for many reasons. Magos (2010) suggested that one reason for this void is that a large percentage of faculty members in early childhood education college environments choose to focus more on developing the technical skills required to be effective teachers rather than researchers. Magos also mentioned in the same article that Early Childhood Education faculty may not have experienced in-depth research courses in their undergraduate degrees or within in-service programs. Without core research knowledge or experiences, faculty groups may be missing the scientific criteria associated with research that may be used to examine their practices or the questions that evolve from their work and observations. Often, as in this case, faculty members have the curiosity and questions that they would like to explore; it is the process of getting started in research that is the challenge for new researchers, rather than the lack of desire to embark on research. Those who do not have the educational background or experience with research may struggle with questions such as where to begin, how to do it, and the ultimate question of “why pursue research?” In response to some of these questions, this article highlights how narrative inquiry and action research were used to illustrate how research methods are

applicable to faculty teaching in an early childhood program and how they may be extended to lab schools.

Narrative and Action Research

There are many qualitative research methods that Early Childhood Education faculty and lab school staff may use for research projects. For example, combining narrative inquiry with action research supports individuals and groups in exploring their thoughts and bringing meaning to their experiences through the use of reflection and writing about their reflections as a way to tell their stories. Narrative inquiry uses stories from participants as a framework for research. Meier and Stremmel (2010) have consistently suggested that “stories are universal mirrors that show us the truth about ourselves – who we are and why we do what we do” (p. 249). Looking in mirrors that are not familiar to us extends learning (Brookfield, 1995). Similarly, having stories examined by others who do not share your assumptions has the potential to produce more in-depth learning because if the environment is correct, there are opportunities for discourse to occur. Discussion with others ultimately brings clarity to the stories, offers new perspectives, and enhances diverse thinking. Conversely, when there is a comfort zone, such as those found with colleagues, the conversations and reflections have more chance of becoming an “unproductive loop in which the same prejudices and stereotypes are constantly reaffirmed” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 29). When educators consult their experiences and stories from the other side of the mirror, such as in the role of a researcher and with colleagues, there are increased opportunities to change their way of thinking about situations. This often results in bringing new meaning to their experience. Narrative inquiry, combined with reflective practice and action research, supports participants in examining experiences based on their past experiences, present perspectives, and future aspirations (Cole & Knowles, 2000).

Early Childhood Education faculty may consider using action research in their practice because it is “considered to enhance professional learning and to foster reflective practice” (Rodd, 1994, p. 144). The method is simple and easily implemented (Moore & Gilliard, 2008). As identified by McKernan (1991), “action research is a form of active learning; in essence, planned or studied enactment” (p. 42). Action research begins with a sense of curiosity and wonderment. According to Johnson (2005), it involves five essential steps.

First, ask a question, identify a problem, or define an area of exploration. Determine what it is you want to study. Second, decide what data should be collected, how they should be collected, and how often. Third, collect and analyze data. Fourth, describe how your finding can be used and applied. You create your plan for action based on your findings. And finally, report or share your findings and plan for action with others. (p. 21).

Action research then, is a way for educators to step back, think, and develop a more in-depth understanding of their goals. In essence, it is a process that supports educators in reconstructing or creating new knowledge while strengthening their beliefs and practices. Hatch et al., (2006) suggested that “the emphasis should be placed on the ‘action’ part of the action research” (p. 206). When action research is conducted in

groups it becomes participatory. Participatory action research is both an action process and a social process; one that is practical, collaborative, and emancipatory whereby individuals explore their practices and experiences and compare them to those of colleagues or individuals in their social structures.

Meanwhile, Pushor and Clandinin (2009) identified that narrative inquiry, reflective practice, and action research are complementary because they all focus on change and action. Each of these processes requires rigorous thought and analysis by participants in order to understand situations and for new knowledge creation to surface. New knowledge creation provides a lens for individuals to examine their practice and reconstruct their practices individually and collaboratively. Reflecting upon a question or experience and telling one's story as part of a narrative inquiry process further supports the exploration of one's values, beliefs, culturally-learned perspectives, philosophies, and ways of knowing. Together these enable educators to bring meaning to their daily practice and experiences (Strong-Wilson, 2006). Paley (1997) determined that documenting her reflections became a way for her to listen to herself think. Educators who take the risk and share their reflections and stories with their colleagues for the purpose of examining similarities and differences are researchers (Meier & Stremmel, 2010).

Early Childhood Education faculty who participate in action research and narrative inquiry learn about themselves as educators and how to use new learning to inform their practice (Meier & Stremmel, 2010). Combining research methods with reflection can address areas of inquiry related to curriculum or practices in early learning lab schools or diploma programs (Hatch et al., 2006). Paley (1997) maintained that teachers who write about their areas of confusion or questions evolving from their work with children or reflection on their practice do so because they are driven to "study and ponder grandly" (p.viii.), which is also reflected in the professional realm of Early Childhood Education faculty.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative action research was to examine the feelings, questions and realities of four female Early Childhood Education faculty members, a college administrator responsible for applied research, and an external educational consultant about the potential of embarking on action research in a publically funded college in Atlantic Canada. Conducting action research was a new endeavour for the faculty group.

An action research methodology was used as a way to gain an understanding into some of the questions, challenges, and realities that faculty may face if they incorporate action research into their scope of practice. In this case, action research allowed for the exploration of "subjective dimensions of human experience" (Stringer, 2004, p. 4). Further, the reflective nature of this action research project "show [ed] how a set of events or phenomena are perceived and interpreted by actors in the setting" (Stringer, 2004, p. 26), which leads to a deeper understanding of the phenomena.

Using the reflective journals of the participants, the study was designed to partner with the Early Childhood Education faculty to experience how research may be

conducted through narratives and reflection, and how the examination of ideas and experiences presented can inform practice and contribute to new knowledge creation (Pusher & Clandinin, 2009). The combination of writing reflections, examining the themes in the reflective journals, writing about the findings, and having discourse about the findings emulated a cyclical process approach that is commonly used in qualitative research (Brookfield, 2006). These findings may be helpful to other faculty, administrators, and consultants interested in pursuing a research program.

Data Gathering

This action research project evolved from an intensive professional learning session on action research that was conducted by the educational consultant with the faculty group and the college administrator responsible for institutional research. The educational consultant used a learning community approach, identified by Huber et al, (2007), that supported integrative learning, dialogical dialogue and reflection as a way to link theory to practice: “develop, make, recognize, and evaluate connections among disparate concepts, fields, or contexts” (p. 57). The focus of the professional learning event was to introduce the concept of action research to the participants and illustrate how action research may be conducted by early childhood care and education faculty within a college environment.

During that session, discussions occurred on the how, why, if and when of action research. As faculty began to express their thoughts about “getting started” in action research, their interest in and curiosity about conducting research was expressed as they identified potential topics that they would like to examine. As well, they had questions that focused more on college policies, what action research means for program curriculum, the human resources necessary, and the potential knowledge gaps that may require further discussion and clarification. The dialogue reinforced that participants were experiencing varying levels of disequilibrium – they expressed enthusiasm about research possibilities as well as questions and concerns about moving a research agenda forward because of “unknowns” such as how to fit research into their current responsibilities or how to adjust their current responsibilities to make time to support a research agenda.

The participants collectively recognized from their various conversations and thinking processes that they needed to explore their individual and group questions surrounding this potentially new venture before they could make a commitment to move an action research agenda forward. The educational consultant suggested one way to examine the potential of bringing action research to life would be for the group to engage in an action research project. She suggested that the participants use a reflective journal process as a way to focus their narrative stories about their feelings and questions related to the potential of beginning action research in their program. Faculty accepted this challenge and over a two month period documented their feelings and questions about proceeding with action research. At the same time, the administrator responsible for institutional research and the educational consultant determined that they would also reflect upon and document their feelings. All reflections were circulated to the educational consultant. Then, the educational consultant used the interpretive model of analysis to examine the data (Hatch, 2002). This process included

close readings of the stories as a way to seek out common themes and code commonalities (Stringer, 2007) and differences. A faculty colleague also coded the reflections and then the coding categories were compared. There were similar themes, such as making time/finding space and so many questions and so few answers. The faculty member and the educational consultant had discussions about the themes that they had identified. Although not exactly the same, they were similar and there were also similar ideas around the content that supported each of the themes.

Findings of the Study

In this research, we set out to investigate the thoughts, feelings, and questions that the Early Childhood Education faculty, the administrator responsible for research, and the educational consultant had about the potential of participating in and conducting action research. The participants were asked to document some of their feelings, learning, and areas of disequilibrium as they thought about embarking on action research. The responses to this open-ended question were detailed, which led us to determine that the comments were suitable for qualitative analysis. The responses to the question brought forth the following themed questions: Why is action research being pushed as part of the college agenda? What is action research and how does it fit into the Early Childhood Education diploma program? If the faculty group embarks on action research, how do we make the time and find the space to get started? Through a reflective process and journal documentation, the faculty, administrator and consultant were able to tell their stories about their feelings, which brought forth some similar concerns and different perspectives about taking on a journey in action research.

The journal entries acted as “filters” for each participant to figure out and share their understanding of how and what they were feeling about what it means to pursue action research. Much of the tension expressed by faculty centred on their personal knowledge base about what action research is, how to conduct action research, and how action research fits within their Early Childhood Education diploma program curriculum, the lab school, and their current responsibilities. They also expressed the importance of having opportunities to have discussions on what a research agenda would look like from the perspective of their roles and responsibilities, the time needed, and the human resources available to support the process. These are common questions expressed by many faculty groups exploring the potential of conducting research (Magos, 2012).

The tension expressed by the administrator focused upon the push/pull aspect of leadership. In this case, conducting action research and writing for publication is new to faculty, staff, and students in the Early Childhood Education program, so when to push and when to pull, and also when to stand back and do nothing are critical benchmarks for growth and development of a focused research plan in this area. The educational consultant struggled with what her role was, such as how much to guide or push and how much or how little to become involved in the process. She also needed to determine what the right balance of support was, without being seen as an assertive external consultant.

Action research on the College agenda

The participants' journal entries provided insight into their thoughts about research, the college agenda, and their perspectives about how and why research is being pushed as a strategic direction within the College. Two faculty members identified that over a period of six to eight months they began to hear more intentional discussions about an action research agenda being promoted across their institution. For example, one faculty provided four examples of how she had noticed the research agenda was becoming more prevalent within the college. The first example was in a press release in 2011 for the opening of the new lab school. She recalled:

The College is putting this out there in print form, it is in the official news release and... it is in the President's language at the opening.

The second example was that:

Management had spoken of the desire for research at the [lab school] centre but there had been no dialogue on the specifics.

Then, in early September 2012, this same faculty member was asked to speak to the College's Applied Research Council around what was happening around research in the lab school. She identified in her reflections that she shared with Council that: "There is no formal outdoor research project happening...[at this time]."

Soon after, her program manager asked her about action research as well. As she thought about these situations, it became clear that research is on the college agenda. The administrator acknowledged both at the workshop and in her journal that there are competing agendas that will impact the faculty. She identified that she is eager to get research going, but recognized her need to take a step back. She used the analogy: "When there are deer in the headlights, you have to be careful to assure they do not get run over in the process."

She determined that she had a major role in figuring out how to support staff embarking on research. She noted that there is a golden opportunity for applied research within the Early Childhood Education program and the lab school. She wants to make the most of it, but she does not want to trample over people in the process. She posed core questions in her journal such as: "What do the faculty/staff want/need to do?"

She determined that she has an important role in protecting everyone, while moving things forward. She expressed: "While exciting, it is a conundrum." She recognized faculty and staff must be the drivers in this journey.

What Does Action Research Look Like? / Learning Dispositions:

Defining and understanding action research is influenced by one's experience, interest, and sense of curiosity. From the onset, faculty members expressed their need to gain more of an understanding of the theory and practice of research before they could commit to participating in it. For example, one faculty wrote that more than six months prior to this study that her group had requested a meeting with the Applied Research office to get a definition and clarity of what action research looks like. She needed answers to questions such as: what does it look like, who does it, how is it

done, and what can it study? One of the core learning pieces that resonated with her from that meeting came from discussions with a colleague who:

Encouraged us to think about the things we come up against every year...what do we 'stub our toes on' each year and struggle to know how to resolve these issues?

This explanation had meaning for her and helped her examine the possibilities of what could be researched. Similarly, another colleague wrote:

What does this/will this actually look like and sound like on a daily basis?

The not knowing of what it would look like in their daily work life appeared challenging for all of the participants, yet it was clear from the journals that faculty had a sense of curiosity about participating in action research. The conversations, questions and reflections clearly identified that faculty are interested in learning more about action research and figuring out the "if, how, why, what, and when" scenarios associated with starting such a process.

Recognizing one's strengths and opportunities for further development is a first component of a continuous learning perspective (Merriam et al., 2007). As part of the professional learning workshop on action research, the participants were given peer-reviewed articles on topical early childhood education issues to read. The educational consultant identified in her journal that it was her perception that by having the participants examine the articles both for content and the process of presenting research findings that the participants began to make the connections between the process of conducting research and writing about the findings. This exercise advanced their critical lens and was a first step in preparing them for their research journey. Similar to the findings of Magos (2012), the contextual discussions suggested that the faculty group had limited experience in examining educational research with the intent of having critical dialogue about the research process or findings presented. Engaging in learning opportunities that support faculty in "tweaking" information and expanding opportunities to see how action research informs practice can influence how faculty choose to move forward with an action research agenda.

So Many Questions and so Few Answers – Making Time and Finding Space in the Workday:

The action research event was designed to be delivered using a cyclical process of theory, discussion, and application followed by reflection. This format was intended to follow Brookfield's (2006) model of introducing a concept, followed by at least three practical examples from the facilitator, followed by the participants' attempt to provide examples from their perspectives.

The educational consultant identified the importance of listening carefully to the participants' discussion to extract the questions and concerns that they were expressing. She noted in her journal that from their discussions she could tell that:

They were kind of hooked yet they were feeling stretched. They expressed concern about how to do this with everything else that they have to do.

Similarly, the administrator acknowledged in her journal that the Early Childhood Education faculty have a lot on their plate: “And they are only just learning the ins and outs of having a lab school.”

Two faculty posed questions such as:

Where does action research fit into the curriculum? How can we ask students to do this when we are not comfortable with it yet?

Another faculty identified that much time and energy is spent addressing the individual needs of students plus administrative and team tasks when not teaching a course. She said:

All of these needs take away creative time for planning and reflection and also influences what gets a focus.

These types of comments are real and if not addressed can become barriers to research.

One faculty member identified that:

Without a concrete plan of action, action research will not occur, even though the idea of action research intrigues her. If there is not a concrete plan and scheduled plan to move forward, it is very difficult to keep the group momentum.

Another faculty questioned: “Are we really interested in this as a team?”

She posed another core question:

Are we on our own individual journeys or is there to be a team effort with the whole concept of action research and what are we doing action research?

She acknowledged that stepping out of the comfort zone can be such an uncomfortable spot to be in. The third faculty member indicated: “I just feel that this is the next move for us as a program – it is time!”

However, she also recorded that the hesitation is:

Really it’s about time, time, time: the lack of it, the amount of it, the passing of it – where can I find it?

Another faculty indicated that:

Time issues often become our response, but we all have the same amount of time and we can choose how we use it.

The consultant recalled in her journal that for her personally, she began action research with a partner and a mentor. She identified that she did not have the confidence to do research on her own and that she worked with a partner on many research projects before tackling one on her own. Conducting research with a partner continues to be her preferred option because it broadens perspectives and she believes the writing of the results is of a higher quality when at least two people are preparing the story to be told.

The consultant also identified in her journal that at the conclusion of the professional learning session, that she felt participants were thinking about the process and that their dialogue about what next and where to go from here was realistic. She wrote:

I suspect that some faculty members were in disequilibrium. Although disequilibrium is uncomfortable, it is a necessary process that contributes to new thinking patterns and that supports individuals in figuring out what is best for them.

The administrator acknowledged that she was dealing with her own disequilibrium. She said:

My disequilibrium is around the lack of my own subject matter expertise and my natural enthusiasm for research.

She identified that from an institutional perspective there are also questions, concerns and processes that need to be figured out. Listening to the staff clearly brings forth their concerns. Hearing the question, “Where do we go from here?” and “how do we do that?” are core questions that need to be answered before proceeding. External pressures and politics are also a concern because applied research is viewed as a vital component of the province’s knowledge creation direction and economic driver. The administrator identified that she senses from at least one staff member a strong resistance about pressure from external sources. She identified that:

I am worried that I am not listening enough to what the faculty/staff are saying in relation to this and that I am going full steam ahead, when it isn’t the right time.

Meanwhile, the faculty group have had time to think and reflect, resulting in some of the feelings of disequilibrium being addressed. For example, one faculty said:

The stars are becoming aligned [and] that this seems to be the time to move forward.

She also identified that:

My head is getting in a better space, far more optimistic and hopeful and far less cynical and doubtful.

Two faculty members highlighted the importance of having peer support. One faculty member identified that she appreciated that:

One will not be alone in this journey and that is a very reassuring thought.

Another faculty member identified that even though there is support from the research office:

The process needs to come from us.

It becomes clear that before faculty are ready to participate in action research as a group, there are many individual, group, and institutional questions that must be addressed. Addressing the questions and creating an environment that sets up the research and risk taking journey for success will contribute to removing the mystery around the various aspects of an action research agenda.

Discussion

At the beginning of this action research project we identified, through conversations during the professional learning workshop and from the journals completed by the participants, that there were many thoughts, feelings, and questions about establishing a research agenda. Specifically, the faculty had an interest in examining the potential of establishing action research as part of their program, but they needed further direction on the process of conducting action research (Magos, 2012). They expressed legitimate concerns about trying to figure out what action research is, how to do it, and how it could fit with their teaching and learning schedules. Adding new responsibilities, such as embarking on action research, is a significant change to practice and one that can be overwhelming, especially if it is seen as an add-on to an already diverse faculty role.

The administrator had apprehensions about knowing if, when, and how far to push the faculty into incorporating action research into their practice, the Early Childhood Education program, and the lab school. The educational consultant stressed the importance of establishing a learning climate with the faculty that would be supportive of them as individuals and the group as they explored the 'muddiness' surrounding research. She also emphasized the importance of a safe place for faculty to learn and explore more about the process and benefits of conducting action research. As identified by Pascal and Bertram (2009), administrators have an important role in providing faculty with a variety of forums to express their perspectives and access to resources that will help them in areas requiring further development. Similar to researchers, there is a need to "listen with all their senses to what is being communicated and then to reflect deeply about what this expression means" (Pascal & Bertram, 2009, p. 259). Such an approach would support faculty in being able to express their curiosity for research while figuring out if, how, or when to move forward with a research agenda.

To begin or to advance action research with faculty or lab school staff in Early Childhood Education programs requires participants to engage in a change process (Fullan, 2001). Administrators facilitate the change process by providing faculty with the tools, time, and resources necessary to move a new agenda forward. Although institutions can provide knowledge-based professional learning opportunities for faculty as part of their professional development program (Hardre, 2012), learning processes that support faculty in internalizing a model of action research are more likely to help faculty transfer theory to actual practice (Brookfield, 2006). Being able to translate ideas into language appropriate for the organization supports new researchers in gaining a level of comfort and credibility as they begin to think about the possibilities of participating in research (Roth et al., 2007).

In this study, the faculty participants clearly articulated that to understand the concept and the process of conducting action research requires more than just reading about what it is and how to do it. Learning new processes through a scaffolding process provides participants with what they are expected to do and how to proceed (Brookfield, 2006). In this instance, faculty identified the need for a scaffolding process to be established so that they could gain knowledge about action research and then experience a step-by-step process of conducting action research. This step-by-step process is supported by Vygotsky's (1978) *zone of proximal development* perspective.

Faculty members require a learning process that builds on their past learning and encourages new learning at increasingly difficult levels. This stretching process can support faculty in figuring out what is meant by concepts presented and how those concepts might look in various situations. This process generates new or reconstructed knowledge. As in this case, faculty were challenged with theory, group dialogue, application of theory to practice, and then time to think about, reflect, and ponder what action research would mean in their practice. Faculty members needed to figure out the context of action research in theory and how it would fit with their teaching and learning responsibilities. Developing a professional learning community that can support and encourage faculty groups to collectively explore topics such as action research and determine a variety of informal and formal resources available to them (Hord, 2004) has the potential to create continuous learning. The identification of personal, departmental and institutional resources also allows faculty groups to plan for and participate in self-directed learning and activities within their group environment (James, 2011). As suggested by Hord (2004), a professional learning community will “seek new knowledge and ways of applying that knowledge” (p. 20). That is exactly what happened with this project.

Once faculty members gain confidence in one aspect of the research process, they are more likely to take additional risks and explore new aspects or processes associated with action research. This requires faculty to have a variety of professional learning opportunities that will support them in gaining the confidence to participate in research, connect research to practice, and explore how research-based pedagogical strategies may be incorporated into curriculum. For instance, in this situation the administrator, faculty, and consultant participated in a professional development experience, recorded their reflections, later examined the participants’ journal entries, and critiqued the content of this article from their lens. This led to supporting open dialogue and thinking about action research from a variety of perspectives. The process of examining the participants’ journal entries as a beginning action research project has demonstrated how their lived experiences, when examined, can contribute to new knowledge creation.

When faculty who are new to action research have opportunities to participate in telling their stories, they can see that the process of action research, despite its simplicity, can be a powerful tool for examining problems and creating solutions. For this team in particular, action research brought forth common feelings and concerns about embarking on the journey of action research. Without this research project, such feelings may not have been shared among the team or systematically examined for themes or questions that require action. For example, the administrator may not have thought about her questions, feelings or concerns in the same way or with the same depth or clarity as she did because of her reflective journal, the discussions with faculty, or the input and critique of the content in this article. We believe that this action research project contributed to the faculty, administrator and consultant gaining new knowledge about action research, the importance of addressing individual and group questions, and the benefits of stepping back and reflecting upon the dialogue that is being expressed. Such learning experiences may advance risk-taking in learning and the change process. Although the faculty participants were new to the process of action research, they were able to grasp the concepts of the methodology and contextualize

the core questions that needed to be asked and answered, as individuals and as a faculty group, about what action research means to their professional practice, early childhood education diploma program, and lab school. They articulated valuable questions for the faculty team, administration and the educational consultant.

This study clearly identifies that the role of the administrator, in this case the Director responsible for research, has an important role in creating an environment that is conducive to a professional learning community. Faculty require support to actively engage in training and projects that will support the interactive and collaborative processes necessary to learn about and conduct action research. The findings confirm the importance of administrators and educational consultants hearing faculty voices when embarking on new processes and institutional directions.

Concluding Thoughts

Reflections from the faculty members, administrator, and consultant identified the need for faculty to have access to professional learning on action research as well as a guide/mentor to support the step-by-step process needed to conduct action research. The data from the administrator identified the importance of listening to faculty concerns and figuring out ways to support them and putting into place the right supports, at the right time, with the right people. As discussed previously, the faculty members have a sense of curiosity and interest in exploring conducting action research. At the same time, they have legitimate questions about what resources and what changes to current responsibilities would be required in order to conduct research activities. Action research and narrative inquiry requires space and time for reflection and dialogue. When concerns are expressed there is a need for them to be addressed if the institution and faculty are going to be successful in taking the necessary steps to embark on an action research journey.

The authors suggest that the findings from this small study indicate that the early childhood education faculty in this college have an interest in participating in action research. This leads to a larger question: how broadly does this interest exist in other colleges with early childhood diploma programs? In just over a six-month period, the faculty members in this study have determined that they are willing to examine the preliminary steps in research. They have an interest in exploring the potential of using action research studies in the early childhood education college curriculum and in conducting their own action research. This presents a solid foundation to continue building the research agenda in early childhood development at this college.

Limitations of the Study

There are a number of limitations to this study. The first limitation is that the group size was small and it was a self-selected participant group. Another limitation was that for some this was their first attempt to participate in an action research study and to write reflections for inquiry that would be shared amongst colleagues and used to formulate an action research project. Another limitation was the varying styles used to document reflections. Some of the reflections were not as comprehensive as others, possibly because the initial question was open-ended and there were no specific instructions given for the expected depth or breadth of the documentations. Finally,

some participants may have more experience and confidence in reflective practice or in the comfort of sharing their work with colleagues.

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