DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 262 075 TM 850 552

AUTHOR Hannay, Lynne M.; Stevens, Kelline W.
TITLE Doing Collaborative Research.
PUB DATE Jan 85
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Meadow Brook Symposium on Collaborative Action Research in Education (Rochester, MI, January, 1985).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Role; Case Studies; Classroom Research; Data Collection; *Educational Cooperation; Educational Research; *Educational Researchers; Elementary Education; Higher Education; Leadership; *Participant Observation; *Principals; Research Design; *Research Methodology
IDENTIFIERS *Collaborative Research

ABSTRACT

A collaborative approach to educational research was used by an elementary school principal and a university researcher. The principal's daily activities were studied, as was the relationship of the roles she performed to instructional leadership. Data were collected mainly from participant observation and field notes. The principal performed six roles: personal confidante; procurator; problem solver; building organizer; monitor; and district liason. The managerial role affected instruction and curriculum indirectly through school climate. The project was successful because both participants considered themselves as equal co-investigators and agreed on objectives, data collection methods, and who performed the research. Both individuals also possessed the necessary skills to accomplish the project. As for the collaborative method, four concerns were discovered: (1) confidentiality of interviewees and observers when both researchers share data; (2) reactivity-bias in actions based on awareness of the research; (3) differing roles and responsibilities; and (4) participants isolation when the research is completed. (GDC)

DOING COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH.

Lynne M. Hannay
The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

Kelline W. Stevens
The Ohio State University

Paper Presentation

at the

Meadow Brook Symposium

on

Collaborative Action Research in Education

Oakland University

January, 1985

Collaboration holds divergent meanings for different people and contexts. In one instance, collaboration means working with the enemy during war. Perhaps this aptly describes how many practitioners view educational research. The outside researcher conducts a blitzkrieg study with little active involvement asked of the practitioner and little input requested on the problem studied or the research techniques. Almost conversely, collaboration has a second more positive meaning which suggests that individuals or groups work closely and harmoniously to create a product. In this latter mode, collaborative research could generate research more reflective of the real world of schools and assist in bridging the gap between theory and practice. This is the promise of collaborative research that attracts both university-based and school-based researchers.

Whether the promised benefits accrue is dependent upon how collaboration is practiced. Through this approach, it is possible to gain an insider's perspective while concurrently maintaining an academic, detached position. However, the feasibility of conducting such research is partly determined by how the collaboration is conceptualized and operationalized. Even within the academic community that embraces collaborative research, several different meanings are ascribed to the term. For instance, Johnson (1983) perceives collaborative research to mean working with another academic from a different discipline; with no reference made of sharing the process with the 'subject'. De Voss, Zimpher, and Nott (1982) hint that the practitioner

should be involved in the study but maintain that the university researcher, "must remain in the driver's seat" (p. 41). The degree of the participant involvement has been classified by Kennedy (as cited in Ward & Tikunoff, 1982) as: 1/ a model to be observed; 2/ a model/participant; 3/ a data collector; 4/ a co-investigator; or 5/ a practitioner consultant. Similarly, Tikunoff and Ward (1983) suggest a continuum: interactive research, clinical inquiry, collaborative staff development research, collaborative action research, and action research.

Obviously, the degree of the collaboration must reflect the needs of the research study and those of the researchers involved. Each study will require different forms and degrees of collaboration (Kyle & McCutcheon, 1984). In studies where it is important to understand the participants' perspective, a higher degree of collaboration would seem essential. It is important to note that there is not a proper degree of collaboration but that this remains dependent upon the research.

We accept that benefits accrue from collaborative research, including: increased probability of successful implementation; professional growth for those involved; the complex nature of the classroom or setting will be included; and the reduction of the time-lapse between the research endeavor and the use of the findings (Ward & Tikunoff, 1982; Kyle & McCutcheon, 1984). However, the purpose of this paper is not to raise global issues on the importance of collaborative research. The aim of this paper is to explore the concerns which emerged from our

involvement in doing collaborative research. In the study a principal and an outside researcher acted as co-investigators to examine the instructional leadership role of the principal. The following discussion is based on methodological fieldnotes and a retrospective analysis of a two year qualitative, collaborative study. Through this analysis we hope to further the discussion on the methods of conducting a collaborative research study.

The Study

A brief summary of the study will provide a context as this paper will not discuss the research per se. After the study has been outlined, the focus will return to the issues involved in doing collaborative research.

Design

The research design of this study was phenomenological in nature, with the purpose of understanding the participants view of the setting. The collaborative nature of the study facilitated this aim because it enabled the principal and the university researcher to work together to frame the research questions, analyze the data, and write the respective papers. The researchers did not enter into the study with an extensive conceptual framework but intended to gather data on what the principal did during the school day; and then to make sense of the data. In this endeavor, the researchers were guided by an initial broad question: What roles does this principal perform and what is the relationship of those roles to instructional leadership.

Data Collection Techniques

The primary data collection technique employed was participant observation by the university researcher. Field notes were maintained on the events occurring from both the principal's and the university researcher's perspectives. Frequent 'de-briefings' were held between the two researchers, and methodological notations of the collaborative process were maintained throughout the study. Initially, the principal attempted to maintain fieldnotes on her activities on the days the university researcher was absent. The nature of her position soon prohibited this method of data collection, and indeed, interfered with her activities as a principal. In order to maintain collaboration during this phase, the fieldnotes generated by the university partner were shared and discussed with the principal.

Triangulation of both data sources and methods of data collection was actively sought. Data sources included extensive field notes, school documents/records, and formal and informal interviews with the principal, teachers, and students. Persistent observation was achieved through an extended period of data collection. Specifically, the university researcher spent both half and full days once or twice a week in the school between January to April of 1982, and January to March, 1983. During these two time periods both formal and informal interviews were conducted with teachers and students. A set of formal, confidential, audio-taped, close-ended interviews were conducted

by the university researcher with teachers selected from each grade level (K-5) and a non-certified staff member. Informal interviews were conducted with children and teachers when deemed appropriate.

Data analysis was on-going and was based on the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Field notes and interview transcripts were initially coded by both researchers into interaction categories and were then re-organized to reflect the emerging analytical themes.

Findings

The findings (Hannay & Stevens, 1984a & 1984b) are reported at two different levels: a descriptive account of the principal's role in the school and a more theoretic/analytical discussion of how these roles influenced instruction and curriculum in the school. On the descriptive level, the study suggests that this principal performed six general roles: personal confidante; procurator; problem solver; building organizer; monitor; and district liaison. These roles had both a direct and indirect influence on instruction although the indirect role appeared to have more of an impact. Specifically, the study documented how the managerial role impacts on instruction and curriculum indirectly through school climate.

POTENTIAL CONCERNS OF COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

While the primary focus of this study was to investigate the role of the principal, a secondary intent was to examine collaborative research in action. The collaborative nature of

the study permitted the researchers to study the role of the principal in a more holistic and realistic manner. This does not mean that collaborative research is easy or 'the' quick answer to educational research problems. Certainly, while this approach seemed to be beneficial in this studied context, its application raises concerns and issues which constitute the subject of this paper. The discussion focuses on four major concerns: 1) Confidentiality; 2) Reactivity; 3) Roles and Responsibilities; and 4) Return to Isolation. Prior to addressing these issues, the successful collaborative aspects of this study will be explored. Perhaps, certain pre-conditions must exist in order for collaboration to work.

PRE-CONDITIONS FOR COLLABORATION

The collaborative nature of the study was evident even during the entry phase. The principal wanted to initiate an action research study to determine her role as an instructional leader. The university partner was concerned primarily with conducting a qualitative study although she was also interested in how a principal influences curriculum. Therefore, the principal initiated the project with a vague question related to her concerns as a practitioner. This influenced the collaboration as the practitioner was investigating a topic she had deemed important. The resulting sense of ownership might well be the key reason for the success of the collaboration.

Black and De Lucca (1978-79) outline three areas that should be considered when undertaking collaborative research: what is

the object of the research; how are the data collected; and who performs the research. In our experience it is perhaps the first question, the purpose of the research, that is a crucial pre-condition for collaboration (Wallet, Green, & Haramis, 1981). As mentioned above, the practitioner instigated the research for the purpose of describing her practice; the university researcher agreed with this purpose. Therefore, the study started at the descriptive level and only moved to a more theoretic/analytical level when deemed necessary by both researchers in order to understand the nature of instructional leadership. If the practitioner and the outside researchers have non-complimentary purposes in conducting the study, it might be questionable whether true collaboration can develop.

The most important reason for the effective collaborative nature of the study was that both researchers were actively and equally involved. They considered themselves "co-investigators" (Kyle & McCutcheon, 1984) with neither partner having a dominant role. This was possible because both individuals had good interpersonal and communications skills. Potential problems were addressed without interfering with the respective egos. Additionally, the researchers shared similar philosophical stances regarding research methodology and education in general. This empathetic relationship developed a sense of trust which in turn allowed both researchers to take risks. Furthermore, the ability and willingness of both individuals to partake in reflective thinking was an important component of this study.

Another asset involved the university person's orientation to practice and the principal's willingness to view her practice from a theoretical perspective.

These characteristics shaped the ethos of the study. Decisions and analysis were conducted jointly. This led to 'a meeting of the minds' with both researchers understanding the other's perspective and mutually generating the process and creating the product. The 'meeting of the minds', a legal term borrowed from contract law, seems to reflect the essence of collaborative research. Collaboration cannot be viewed as the means through which to get 'inside' the participant researcher's head, but must be conceived as a mutual enterprise in order for the total benefit to accrue. Those interested in undertaking collaborative research must invest time and bracket their respective egos if this state of mind is to be achieved. If one of the parties controls the research through the use of knowledge or personality then the potential for collaboration declines.

Finally, it is important to note that the circumstances in this study were conducive to collaboration: both parties desired that type of involvement and had the skills to achieve it. Collaboration does not happen amorphously nor can it be conducted by just anyone. Involvement in this type of research entails both rigorous methodology and a willingness to act collaboratively. If the practitioner is not able or willing to invest the time to investigate personal practice or the university researcher is not willing to share the research

process, then collaboration becomes either problematic or a mere facade. Prior to beginning such a study, participants need to be up-front regarding the demands of the research, the scope of the collaboration, and their expectations. Perhaps the initial 'conditions' have to be right for true collaboration to occur.

CONFIDENTIALITY

One concern in using a collaborative approach is confidentiality. Traditionally, researchers have sought to protect their informants. This could create problems in a collaborative study. In this study, for instance, the university person interviewed both teachers and students on their view of the principalship. The interviews focused on how they perceived the role of the principalship generally and the studied principal specifically. Both researchers formulated the research questions but, given the potentially sensitive nature of the data, the university researcher conducted the interviews. Great care was taken to protect these informants: by changing the names and grade levels within the interview text, by not sharing the interview schedule with the principal, and by not providing any confirmation when the principal guessed the informant. Yet it was very clear that the principal knew the source of the comments and that the outside researcher could not guarantee confidentiality. However, not sharing the data would have decreased the collaborative nature as the principal needed to have access to all data.

A similar problem could also exist in classroom settings with the participating teacher assigning the comments of colleagues or students. This might be more of a concern when the participant researcher is in a position of authority over the informants. Protecting informants while working collaboratively is a vital dilemma that must be addressed. Perhaps, through 'scrambling' the interview data or only sharing a portion of the evidence this protection might be achieved. However, such procedures could undermine the collaborative essence.

As noted by Kyle and McCutcheon (1984), the confidentiality of the participant researcher is also problematic. The participant researcher is a co-author of the papers that emerge out of the study. Therefore, involvement or comments can be ascribed to that individual. For example, at one point we contemplated re-focusing the study to examine administrative politics within the school district. But to pursue this line of investigation might have placed the principal in an awkward position as this study was the only research being conducted within the district and as such was highly visible. Conceivably the topics under collaborative investigation could be restricted given the need to protect the participant researcher.

The potential of placing the participant researcher in a position of professional risk exists within collaborative research studies dealing with sensitive issues. For instance, if the collaborative study is investigating the effectiveness of a certain teaching strategy, then the results could be used to

either the benefit or detriment of the participant researcher. The university researcher can retreat behind the scientific slogan that the evidence is leading the findings. However, the participant researcher is left to deal with the potential, or perceived, negative results.

The confidentiality problem might also create methodological problems. If participants are concerned with the lack of confidentiality, the data generated might be effected. For example, in this study teachers might have masked their opinions regarding the effectiveness of the principal. Persistent observation seems crucial. On one level, it would be difficult for participants to act out a fake scenerio over a long time period. But perhaps more importantly, during an extended period of observation, the participants will begin to trust the outside researcher and this should facilitate the research process. In addition, through persistent observation certain credibility devices can be embedded within the research design thus decreasing the influence on the data generated.

REACTIVITY

Reactivity is a serious issue faced by collaborative researchers, especially those who are acting as co-investigators. In the co-investigator mode both researchers design the research questions. Therefore, it might be tempting to 'skew' events to be congruent with the questions posed. One extract from the methodological notations provides an example. This telephone comment occurred when the university researcher announced she

would not be in the field due to illness. The principal replied, "That's too bad I had planned my day to be an instructional leader. Since we have talked about it, I have tried to be more of one." However, even with this obvious reactivity, initial analysis suggested that this principal was not an instructional leader. It would seem that through continued, persistent observation the principal returned to the typical manner of performing her job. Long term observation might be even more essential in a collaborative study to curtail reactivity and overcome the interference created by the observer's presence. Further, by triangulating the data not generated by the participant researcher, this problem of reactivity might decrease.

Closely related to the above discussion is the influence on the findings of friendship between the researchers (Kyle & McCutcheon, 1984). Certainly, bias could be created because of the developed empathy. Again, it might be tempting to gloss over or not report negative findings because of this relationship. As previously mentioned similar educational philosophies could aid the researchers in creating a 'meeting of the minds'. Conversely, similar beliefs could prohibit critical evaluation of certain mutually accepted practices. Perhaps some degree of cognitive dissonance might be useful in collaborative research as it might assist the researchers in viewing the phenomena from different perspectives. There is a risk, however, of detracting from a 'meeting of the minds'.

Reactivity might provide positive attributes. One of the frequently touted reasons for educational research is educational improvement. Usually, this change results from the practitioner reading about and then implementing suggestions from research findings. In collaborative research, the involved practitioner generates research findings, consequently through reflection the practitioner can investigate and improve personal practice. The potential problem is that the practitioner might not wait for the study to be completed before changing practice. In a pure research sense, this might raise concerns for the credibility of the findings. However, if the changes are documented, the end result might be an account of the change process with the findings more credible to practitioners. Further the decrease of time in implementing educational research is a frequently cited benefit of collaborative research (Tikunoff & Ward, 1983; Huling, Richardson & Hord, 1983). Indeed, Norris, Starrfield, and Hartwell (1984) maintain, "Collaborative research eliminates the separation between the generation of knowledge and its application in the instructional setting" (pg. 146). Certainly in our study, the principal frequently shared the research findings with other administrators and made changes to her practice while the study was still underway.

Of course, methodological techniques could decrease the influence of reactivity and friendship. As with all modes of empirical inquiry, interpretations must be empirically grounded. A committment to referential adequacy and structural

collaboration could help alleviate this concern. In this regard, a conscious awareness of the potential problem and a commitment to empirical research is crucial. However, whether the evidence collected and analyzed will be unconsciously guided by 'inside' knowledge of the research remains a dilemma. This possible guidance must be addressed by those involved in and utilizing collaborative research.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A third set of potential dilemmas centers on the divergent roles and responsibilities of the researchers. Professional and research roles and responsibilities must be considered as co-investigation entails a great deal of time and energy for those involved. For the university researcher, pressured by the rule of publish or perish, this can be considered a component of her professional responsibility. The time and energy expended on such a project could produce dividends that are directly related to university advancement and security. Certainly that has occurred within this study.

For the principal, involvement in research was not part of her role definition and was undertaken in addition to the demands of that position. This would be true for most participant researchers within an educational setting as suggested by Black and de Lucca:

> By and large the system does not recognize teacher research as legitimate in terms of time and resource allocation. As a result there is continual pressure on the teacher from the immediate workload which makes it difficult to keep up the momentum of research (pg. 129).

The principal received such 'pats on the back' for her involvement as acknowledgments in the district annual report and the county educational newsletter. Still the time involved was in addition to her normal working day. However, the principal also accrued personal benefits from her involvement including: 1) an increased awareness of her practice; 2) a decreasing sense of isolation by having a 'partner'; and 3) through the literature review, an understanding of other educational settings applicable to her practice. On a professional level, collaborative research could result in both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards for the university based researcher. However, this research may only result in intrinsic rewards for the participant researcher (Wallet, Green & Haramis, 1981). The following example emphasizes that rewards for the participant researcher might remain primarily intrinsic. The principal involved in this study was denied permission by her Superintendent to attend the 1984 Annual Meeting of AERA. Not only did that rob the participant researcher from potential extrinsic rewards accrued from the presentations, but it also raised questions on the perceived value ascribed to research within this particular school district. This has affected how the participant researcher views involvement in future research projects and her career within the district. Conceivably through either a research grant or the school district's commitment to research this might be alleviated. Such provisions as decreased work loads, financial support, sabbatical leaves, status rewards, or public relations

might be useful in encouraging practitioners' involvement in research.

The roles and responsibilities that each researcher assumes within the study raises other potential issues. Initially, this study was intended to be totally collaborative, but that proved almost impossible given the professional and methodological restrictions. The time available to the principal was one problem. Originally both researchers were to maintain field notes in order to record potential differences in perception, but the hectic nature of the principal's position soon prevented this data collection device. The university researcher dominated the literature review and writing stages.

These constraints were overcome by continuous interaction and on-going data analysis. During the data collection phase, the researchers frequently spent long evenings or weekend afternoons analyzing the evidence. Through this interchange both parties remained involved in the interpretation of the evidence. More importantly, after data collection was completed, both researchers totally devoted a three week period to data analysis. Through this uninterrupted, intense period, a luxury given the pace of the data collection phase, both researchers became immersed in the data, literature, and conceptual framework. This time period in a deserted school during a warm June proved essential to generate a 'meeting of the minds'. Consequently, the collaborative aura was maintained even though one researcher actually wrote the papers.

During the writing phase, the restrictions arising out of professional responsibilities became more noticeable. While writing, the university researcher frequently called the principal for clarification, other examples, or to help solve a problem. The principal considered these concerns, 'fixed them up', or revised for the next exchange of papers. Again, frequent meetings were held to confer on the papers. On one level, the fact that the participant researcher was a principal proved beneficial as these interchanges could occur during the school day. Through this process the papers maintained a sense of joint ownership and did not become the sole property of the writer. This might prove problematic if the practitioner were a teacher.

These professional and research restrictions were partially overcome or neutralized through the continual efforts of both researchers to understand the others' position and responsibilities. Maintaining communications, empathic understanding, and the necessary time to analyze data were of crucial importance. However, in collaborative research the roles and responsibilities of the participants can be prohibitive. Differing rewards and goals might influence what each participant is willing or able to contribute to the process. Obviously, potential researchers must remain cognizant of how these factors could influence the various stages of collaborative project.

RETURNING TO ISOLATION

A final dilemma is the effect of the project's completion on the participant researcher. Teaching is frequently a very

lonely existence with few opportunities to interact with other adults. Through involvement in a collaborative study the practitioner shares that existence with a partner. When the university researcher leaves the site, isolation returns for the practitioner. Involvement in this study, for the principal, has raised such issues as: 1) questions on practice; 2) the relevancy of research to practice and job responsibility; and 3) the feasibility of conducting further research. The participant researcher might be left with a residue of cognitive dissonance but might not possess the expertise or power to make the desired changes. For instance, certain changes could involve structural or administrative re-organization that is beyond the control of the participant researcher (Grundy, 1982). This could result in a sense of frustration. Seemingly, the university researcher has an ethical responsibility to assist with this transition.

CONCLUSION

This paper has raised several issues and dilemmas particularly germane to this collaborative research project. These issues were not raised to undermine collaborative research, but rather to encourage discussion that will strengthen this approach. We remain committed to and excited by this research mode.

Obviously, for university researchers a collaborative study requires much more than simply finding a willing practitioner and getting started. For practitioners, it is more than merely sharing their world with another educator in order to investigate

some educational concern. Both parties must seriously and mutually reflect on the collaborative nature of the project. This not only refers to methodological concerns, but also the collaborative methods and demands involved for the individual researchers. Such issues as time demands, confidentiality, reactivity, roles and responsibilities, and influence on practice must be seriously considered. Certainly, release time for the practitioner might be one possibility in overcoming some of these concerns. The willingness of the university researcher to contribute to the educational setting by acting as a glorified aide might be another. Numerous other factors or arrangements should be considered. Collaboration is demanding and must not be entered into lightly or without serious reflection.

Researchers must honestly record, reflect and analyze how collaboration 'works' in practice. Only then can techniques be developed that best suit this mode, the settings, and the questions posed. On the practitioners' level we must examine the effect on practice, sense of professionalism, or personal perspective. In conclusion, collaborative studies hold great promise for increasing knowledge of the everyday occurrences inside classrooms and schools. By using this research mode, we can study what practitioners deem important from both a personal and professional perspective. We can investigate schooling from a naturalistic, holistic angle. However, while undertaking collaborative studies researchers must address and ultimately resolve the dilemmas that collaborative research can create.

REFERENCES

Black, H. & De Lucca, C. (1978-79). Collaborative research from both sides of the fence. Scottish Education Review, 10-11, 125-132.

de Voss, G., Zimpher, N., & Nott, D. (1982). Ethics in fieldwork. The Urban Review, 14 (1), 35-46.

Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967). The discovery of grounded theory New York: Aldine Publishing Company.

Grundy, S. (1982). Three modes of action research. Curriculum Perspectives, 2 (3), 25-34..

Hannay, L. & Stevens, K. (1984a April). "A guide through the jungle": the indirect curriculum influence of the principal. Paper presentation at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association.

Hannay, L. & Stevens, K. (1984b April). The indirect instructional leadership role of a principal. Symposium presentation at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association.

Huling, L., Richardson, J. & Hord, S. (1983). Three projects show how university/school partnerships can improve effectiveness. NASSP, 67, 54-59.

Johnson, P. (1983). Collaborative research: myths and realities. Canadian Home Economics Journal, 33 (4), 197-199, 213.

Kyle, D. & McCutcheon, G. (1984). Collaborative research: development and issues. Journal of Curriculum Studies, 16 (2), 173-177.

Norris, C., Starrfield, S. & Hartwell, L. (1984). Old adversaries united: benefits of collaborative research. NASSP Bulletin, 68 (471), 143-147.

Tikunoff, W. & Ward, B. (1983). Collaborative research on teaching. Elementary School Journal, 83, (4), 453-468.

Wallet, C., Green, J. & Haramis, M. (1981). Issues related to collaborative research -- the teacher and researcher as a team. In J. Green & C. Wallet (Eds.), Ethnography and language in educational settings (pp. 87-116). Norwood, N.J.: Ablex.

Ward, B. & Tikunoff, W. (1982 February). Collaborative research. Invited paper presentation at The Implications of Research on Teaching for Practice Conference.