Anne Lowe
Université de Moncton

Researcher's Challenge in a Collaborative Approach to Research Mediation Effort Between University and Public School Cultures

Based on examples taken from a collaborative research study investigating contextual elements that contribute to a positive learning/teaching experience for all participants as a result of the incorporation of music and other art forms into the language arts curriculum, this paper describes mediation situations faced by the researcher in an effort to take under consideration the needs of the research community (university scholars) and the expectations of the public school community (classroom teachers). Mediation challenges are discussed at all levels of the research process: the co-situational stage, where the purpose of the study is defined, the co-operational stage, where data is collected and the co-productional stage, where results are analysed and diffused. Professional knowledge is redefined based on the collaborative merging of research and practice.

PARTNERSHIP

The notion of partnership is very present in the concerns of researchers and practitioners coming from economic, educational and social fields (Landry, Anadon & Savoie-Zaje, 1996). In the specific area of education, this partnership, viewed as a system of action, has encouraged new forms of relationships established between universities and educational practice, that is, between university professor/researchers and public school teachers. Faculties, or schools of education, and milieu of practice have been challenged to join together, in a movement of synergy, to find possible solutions to problems emerging from the educational
system. This type of partnership between different actors in education has often resulted in a research partnership where collaboration is established to build a research project which answers to the needs of both the university researcher and the classroom practitioner. According to Goodlad (1993) and Landry et al. (1996), this type of research seems to have a direct impact on educational practice and has contributed in a significant way to determine areas for future investigation.

COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

The need for collaboration between researchers and practitioners to construct knowledge pertaining to educational practice comes from a debate often held between professional practitioners and university researchers. Discussions, especially during the last decade, address a seemingly visible dissociation between what is taught at the university level and what our future teachers will need as knowledge and tools to confront the complexity of issues they will face on a daily basis (Curry & Wergin, 1993; St-Arnaud, 1990, 1992; Schön, 1983, 1987). In order to bridge the gap between theory and practice, a collaborative approach to educational research has been developed where researchers and practitioners co-construct knowledge and meanings of educational practice (Desgagné, 1997). It is important to note that collaborative research means more than doing research in a school setting where we solicit practitioners' participation in the research project. In fact, collaborative research values the competency of the actor-practitioner as a reflective partner and as a key informant of the investigation (Giddens, 1987). He or she, together with the researcher, explore one aspect of educational practice and try to "understand" the phenomenon in the contextual educational environment.

According to Desgagné (1997), collaborative research unites both research goals (production of knowledge) and educational goals (professional development and reflexive opportunities for the teacher to improve his or her practice). Thus, it is beneficial to both the researcher and the practitioner. The researcher, who coordinates the project, must assure that the object under investigation integrates well with the professional development preoccupations of the practitioners. Consequently, the researcher must create a situation where he or she may interact with the practitioner to experience, reflect upon and discuss a social reality related to the research question. In order to better understand this reality, the researcher must play a double role and bare a double identity: a true
participant in the classroom setting, which is essential in order to have access to the research environment, and an educational researcher, whose role necessitates a certain distance and view from the exterior to analyse and interpret the data. The collaborative researcher's challenge will be to unite research and professional development in the same project. This will result in a play of constant "negotiation" between university and educational practice to meet the needs of both cultures (Desgagné, 1997).

Now that we have summarized the role of the researcher, let us describe the specific role of the practitioner in collaborative research. Desgagné (1997) states that the practitioner contributes to the research as a reflective partner who is in constant dialogue with the researcher to co-construct the meaning of the social phenomenon under investigation. Desgagné adds that the practitioner is not expected to participate in the development of all stages of the formal investigation, for example: in defining the purpose of the study, collecting and analysing data, or presenting and publishing the results. Collaboration does not mean that both the practitioner and researcher must participate in all tasks. Each partner contributes to the project according to their specific areas of interest and expertise. In most cases, the practitioner, often with very little research training, will be more interested in finding practical ways to improve his or her teaching without learning about systematic research methods. On the other hand, this does not prevent the practitioner from fully participating in all stages of the research if this is part of his or her professional development agenda.

The essential element of collaborative research is that the researcher must consider the practitioner's point of view, not only when collecting and analysing data, but in all stages of the research process from its preliminary planning to the publishing of the results (Bednarz, Desgagné & Lebuis, 1999). Figure 1 illustrates the collaborative research process.

Collaborative research, as a type of research that solicits the practitioner's point of view as a reflective partner in the investigation of the meaning of educational practice can be categorized, in the world of human sciences, as a form of qualitative research (Desgagné, 1997). Its distinguishing feature is that it emphasises not only a construction of meaning of a situation by the researcher or a group of researchers (Davidson Wasser & Bresler, 1996), but a co-construction of meaning by the researcher in collaboration with all of the social actors (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Collaborative research brings together research and practice in order to merge traditional roles of the researcher and the classroom.
teacher, while ethnographic research reinforces individual roles of the teachers as cultural participants, and researchers as ethnographers (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1992). In ethnographic research, the ethnographer's goal is to describe culture or aspects of culture through "thick description, to share in the meanings that the cultural participants take for granted and then, to depict the new understanding for the reader and for the outsiders" (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1992, p. 39). Collaborative research also differentiates itself from action research where the classroom teacher becomes the researcher as the result of an effort of classroom teacher empowerment (Sagor, 1992). According to Desgagné (1997), collaborative research does not have the purpose of making practitioners researchers, but, as already mentioned, to bring together university researchers and classroom practitioners in a effort of co-construction of meaning. Figure 2 illustrates the differences among the three forms of research.

UNIVERSITY/CLASSROOM TEACHER MEDIATION CHALLENGES DISCOVERED THROUGH A MUSIC/ARTS/LANGUAGE INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH PROJECT

Based on a collaborative research study which investigated contextual elements contributing to a positive teaching/learning experience for all participants as a result of the integration of music and other art forms into the language arts curriculum, we want to discuss in this section of the paper mediation situations faced by the researcher in a synergetic effort to join research and practice. To do so, we will illustrate
Figure 2. Three Forms of Research done in the School environment

**Ethnographic Research**
- **University Researchers**
- **Classroom Teachers**

**Theory**
- Traditional Roles of Researchers and Teachers are Reinforced

**Practice**

**Collaborative Research**
- **University Researchers**
- **Classroom Teachers**

**Theory**
- Traditional Roles of Researchers and Teachers Merge Somewhat

**Practice**

**Action Research**
- **Classroom Teachers as Researchers**

**Theory**
- Traditional Roles are Unified in the Classroom

**Practice**
- Teacher Empowerment
mediation challenges that occurred during each stage of the collaborative research process: 1) the co-situational stage where the researcher must assure that the object under investigation reflects the preoccupations of both research and practice, 2) the co-operational stage where the researcher must ensure that, in an effort to co-construct knowledge, the process must serve as professional development for the teacher and data collection for the researcher, 3) the co-productional stage where data is analysed and diffused (Desgagné, 1997). During the co-productional stage the researcher must establish dialogue between categories emerging from the practitioner's analysis of the situation (practical knowledge) and those which arise from his or her research agenda. In addition, the researcher must find ways to diffuse the results which satisfy both research and practice communities.

CO-SITUATIONAL STAGE

One of the first mediation challenges in a collaborative approach to research is to co-construct a research objective that meets the preoccupations of both the practitioners and the researcher. In this project, the music/arts/language integration concern of the researcher went hand in hand with the "Academic through the Arts" theme selected by an elementary school in the Midwestern part of the United States. Teachers at the "Academic through the Arts" school had solicited the school of music at the nearby university for professional development to help them find ways to integrate the arts into the curriculum. From a research point of view, this need for a partnership activity in a school which valued the integration of the arts into the curriculum seemed to be the perfect occasion to conduct a study on the investigation of contextual elements that contribute to a positive learning/teaching integrated experience while working with the classroom teachers to develop and teach music/arts/language lessons. This university/school partnership activity, coming predominantly from the needs of the school environment, met the concerns of both the practitioner and the researcher. Mediation efforts, thus, were not difficult at this stage of the research process because of the pre-established preoccupations of both university and school cultures.

CO-OPERATIONAL STAGE

Now that a research objective that met the preoccupations of both research and practice communities had been established, the researcher,
in collaboration with the practitioners had to begin the process of co-operating the investigation in the natural school environment. In collaborative research, the researcher solicits what Schön (1983) calls the "practical knowledge" centered around the "theory of action" of the practitioner and, consequently, values their contribution in the co-construction of the meaning of the event under investigation. The researcher's challenge is to negotiate with the school community the choice of classroom teacher participants, and then to determine a research agenda that will meet the professional development needs of the teachers (pedagogical strategies and materials) and serve as a milieu to collect data for the researcher (videos, taped formal and informal interviews).

CLASSROOM TEACHER PARTICIPANTS

The negotiation process to meet the needs of both the researcher and the practitioner began with the choice of classroom teacher participants. Even though, collectively, teachers from the school had solicited professional development help from the university, individual commitment from classroom teachers needed to be arranged. After discussions held between the researcher, school music specialist, school principal and classroom teachers, three second grade classroom teachers showed interest in participating in the project. Thus, a formal meeting took place where the researcher explained her preliminary research agenda which included the participation of one classroom teacher in the co-development and co-teaching of music/language integrated lessons. In addition, classroom teachers were made aware that their participation would involve a reflective analysis of the situation in order to co-construct knowledge pertaining to the contextual elements that contribute to the integration of the learning of both language and music. As the discussion unfolded, it became evident that all three teachers wanted to participate in the study. In a mediation effort to consider the voice of the teachers, the researcher needed to adapt to the situation and accept that the project would not only involve one classroom teacher in one classroom setting, but three classroom teachers in each of their respective classroom environments.

The three teachers spontaneously defined their role as a participative one where they would "watch and learn" while participating in the activities with the children. The professional development needs of the teachers became very obvious as they voiced their vision of the project as an opportunity for in-service training where they would learn how to inte-
grate music into the language curriculum. They added that they would contribute in the defining of the language arts learning outcomes and would share materials. However, the development of the lesson plans and the teaching would be the researcher's responsibility.

As the classroom teachers defined their role in the collaborative study, the "classroom participant" role of the researcher, essential to the merging of research and practice, became evident. Through negotiation, it was decided that I, as the researcher/music specialist would devise, with some input from the classroom teachers, the lesson plans and teach the integrated lessons while the teachers would watch, learn and participate with the children during the intervention.

RESEARCH/PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOCUS

From the onset, the research question was developed by the researcher with the concern to integrate music into the language arts curriculum. The next step was then to decide which component of the language arts curriculum would be suitable for the collaborative research project. The "Aesop's Fables" unit was suggested by the teachers mostly because they felt that the project would help them in the preparation of a "production" of the fables for the school and community in the spring. Singing, dancing, acting and the fabrication of costumes and art décor were activities they felt should be considered for the "production." Since music, not drama nor visual arts, was the predetermined arts focus of the integrated lessons, the dialogue continued around what types of music activities could be incorporated that would also serve in the drama "production." Activities included singing, playing musical instruments, movement (mime) and dance combined with literature. We agreed that adding the visual arts and drama components didn't seem too complicated and would surely enrich the experience.

So, should the music/language research focus be changed to include the integration of all art forms to the language arts curriculum? In fact, when developing a collaborative research design, the researcher must take under consideration the classroom teacher's input in the decision making process surrounding the research focus (Desgagné, 1997). Through dialogue, the researcher and classroom teachers agreed that, since all art forms, including literature, are ways of communication, then connections between all forms of communication could be the focus of the integrated lessons. Consequently, at the co-operative stage, adaptation challenges and mediation efforts were experienced by the researcher
in an effort to consider views of the practitioners while negotiating classroom teacher participation and the research focus.

**GRADUATE STUDENT: TEACHER PARTICIPANT**

While most of the elements needed to complete the co-operative stage of the collaborative research project seemed to be determined, another emerging event required consideration by all partners of the investigation. A graduate student who was hired as a technical assistant to the research showed extreme interest in the integration process, not only as a technical assistant, but also as a teaching partner. She viewed this opportunity as a perfect occasion to "learn by doing." Her enthusiasm, eagerness, organisation skills and competency in the field of music education influenced both the classroom teachers' and the researcher's decision to change the research design again. Consequently, the integrated lessons were team taught by the researcher/music specialist and the graduate student/music specialist. Again, before accepting to include the graduate student as a full teaching participant, the researcher needed to consider the classroom teachers' point of view and the graduate student's interests and expertise. Moreover, during the development and delivery of the integrated lessons, not only the classroom teachers' input, but also the graduate student's ideas needed to be considered. In addition, the graduate student/teacher would participate as a reflective partner and contribute to the co-construction of knowledge of the event under investigation. Negotiation would need to be carried on a triple dimension:

![Figure 3. Three Dimensional Mediation Effort](image-url)
The researcher's challenge, in an effort to merge university (researcher/professor and graduate student) and school (classroom teachers) cultures, was to consider points of view coming from all reflective partners of the collaborative research process.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

At this level of the collaborative research project, the researcher prepares his or her interaction with the classroom teachers in order to explore and examine the objective under investigation. For the researcher, co-construction of the meaning of the event will take place through data collection procedures such as video taping of the intervention, formal and informal interviews with all participants including the students and reflective journal entries. From the practitioner's perspective, this phase of the research process should include the opportunity for in-service training. The researcher now takes on the "active membership role" (Adler & Adler, 1987) where he or she organises the professional development activities and the data collection procedures.

In this particular collaborative research setting, the researcher needed to: 1) co-develop and co-teach the integrated arts/language lessons with the graduate student, 2) create a reflective situation where the teaching role adopted would become part of the natural classroom environment, 3) allow time for interaction with the classroom teachers and 4) ensure data collection procedures that answer to the needs of the research community.

First, a time frame of the integrated arts/language intervention was negotiated to fit the needs and schedules for all participants. Intervention took place during a forty-five minute lesson held in each classroom three times per week over the period of one month. For the researcher, this time frame allowed her to work intensively with all participants in the development and delivery of integrated lessons related to one complete unit of study (Aesop's Fables Unit). In addition, interacting with the environment three times a week contributed more rapid, natural adaptation and insertion into the classroom setting. In fact, children and classroom teachers adjusted very quickly to our interventions and we felt, very soon in the teaching process, part of the school day. The short intensive time frame of the study seemed to have helped the researcher in creating what ethnomethodologists call a "reflective situation" where all participants feel at home in the classroom environment (Coulin, 1993). As all participants became more and more familiar with one another, respect for
each other's expertise was reinforced in order to allow individual freedom of expression in each participant's specific analysis of the situation. In addition, it gave the classroom teachers the opportunity to experience the integrated process as it applied to one unit of their language curriculum, and to see and analyse the evolution of the project from beginning to end.

Methods of data collection were negotiated among participants. Classroom teachers accepted to interact with the researcher through audio-taped informal interviews during the process, and formal interviews after the study. All the lessons were video-taped and children were interviewed during and after the intervention. In addition, the graduate students/teacher and the researcher/teacher kept personal journals. From a research perspective, there was enough of a variety of data collection procedures in order to co-construct with all participants the meaning of the integrated teaching/learning event, and to co-determine the contextual elements contributing to the learning/teaching experience as a result of the integration of all art forms into the language arts curriculum.

The data collection procedures, especially the development and delivery of the integrated lesson plans, were the "crux" of the professional development in-service training activity expected from the practitioners. Twelve 45 minutes lessons were devised by the researcher and graduate student for each of the three classrooms over a period of one month (three sessions a week) with the prime objective of integrating music and other art forms such as drama, visual art and dance into a unit on Aesop's Fables. Classroom teachers chose the fable they wanted to work on among the three that were analysed formally in their language arts curriculum textbook. Meetings were held once a week with each classroom teacher to make final adjustments in order to ensure that learning objectives of the language arts program were met, and connections between arts and language were natural.

At this phase of the co-operative stage, mediation efforts were faced by the researcher at several levels. First, the researcher, who had not officially taught second graders for ten years, needed to adapt to the classroom environment and adopt a "teacher" role in the eyes of the children, and a "mentor" role as viewed by the classroom teachers. In addition, while developing and delivering the lesson plans, the researcher faced the challenge of uniting classroom teachers, graduate student and research agendas. Each one of these partners had a specific purpose to get involved in this integrated arts/fables research project. The classroom teachers wished for in-service training and practical ideas and materials to incorporate into the Aesop's Fables "production". The graduate student/teacher
wanted a teaching opportunity where she could try out integrated learning strategies and ways to empower the children. The researcher, on the other hand, was concerned with data collection and developing an experiential and reflective environment where children were encouraged to establish connections between art forms and literature as different ways of communication. In fact, because of the graduate student/teacher and researcher/teacher's different goals for engaging in the research process, negotiations were often necessary between the co-teachers. For example, decisions were made regarding time allocated for full participation of every child in the classroom versus time granted for making connections among forms of communication through analysis and reflection. The mediation of the expectations coming from each of the three levels of participation (classroom teacher, graduate student, university scholar) was certainly the greatest challenge met by the researcher at this stage of the collaborative effort.

CO-PRODUCTIONAL STAGE

At the co-productional stage, the mediator's challenge in a collaborative approach to research is to establish a dialogue between the meanings and knowledge of the event co-constructed by theory and practice through data analysis, and to diffuse the results of the study in ways that will satisfy both the school and research communities. First, the qualitative analysis of the data consisted of a parallel study of the "points of view" of all actors in context to investigate the meanings discovered through the discourses related to live experience (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

In this collaborative research project, analysis of the practitioners' reflections during the informal interviews revealed a consistent preoccupation with: 1) integrated arts/language activities that motivated and facilitated learning for the children, 2) pedagogical strategies and activities that they would feel comfortable in trying out on their own and 3) the identification of specific songs, dances, visual art and instrumental compositions that would be suitable to incorporate into the "production" of Aesop's Fables. Their reflective analysis of the situation was directly related to their professional development agenda. The teachers' "practical perspective" helped to determine if professional development expectations were met, and to specify which of the arts/language activities worked best in their teaching/learning environment. On the other hand, categories emerging from the analysis of the researcher and graduate stu-
dent's personal journals were mostly related to research methodology, or to pedagogical and integrated learning concerns. Moreover, the feedback received from the children was predominantly associated with what was "fun" for them! These issues went hand in hand with each participant's personal concerns during the collaborative research project. Together with the formal interviews developed around questions directly related to the main research question, the dialogue and mediation of the "practical" day to day concerns of the classroom teachers', graduate student/teacher and children together with the theoretical and pedagogical preoccupation of the researcher contributed to a co-construction of multiple dimensional meanings and understandings of the contextual elements that surround the integration of the arts into the language curriculum. The researcher's challenge was to combine and unite all of the co-constructed components of the data analysis for a clearer understanding of the social phenomenon.

The second part of the co-productional stage consisted of the diffusion of the results. It is false to think that the methods used to diffuse results are only decided upon once the data analysis is completed. Desgagné (1997) states that certain choices may already be made at the co-situational stage. We decided very early in the process that the best way to investigate the contextual elements contributing to a positive arts/language integrated learning/teaching experience was to develop and teach integrated art/language lesson plans, and to co-construct meaning of the event with the practitioners. One of the elements resulting from the study was the development of twelve, forty-five minutes integrated arts/language lessons and materials for three of Aesop's Fables. These lesson plans were experienced and handed out to the teachers as part of their professional development agenda. Video copies of each lesson were also available for the teachers. Moreover, a summary of categories and themes emerging from the data analysis in an attempt to answer the research questions were shared with the school community. The pedagogical strategies, materials and summary of the results of the study handed out to the teachers were tangible ways of showing the university researcher's synergistic mediation efforts of reinvestment into the school community.

From a research perspective, papers will be written focusing on methodological and pedagogical issues emerging from the data analysis. Generic themes or categories answering the research questions: "Did the integrated arts/language lessons reinforce both language and music learning?" and: "What are the contextual elements contributing to a positive arts/language integrated learning/teaching experience?" will be discussed
with description taken from the data to illustrate and substantiate the assertions made. Experiential knowledge coming from the practitioners' discourse, and theoretical acknowledgement coming from a research perspective will be organized into thematic conceptualisations of the event. This is one way of presenting the results in qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In this diffusion process, the researcher will merge the voices of the theorist/researcher and the practitioner/teacher in an effort to "tell the story" and to share with both the school and university cultures the emerging elements discovered while investigating the social phenomenon. Mediation of research and practice is also sought, and necessary when presenting the results of a collaborative research study.

CONCLUSION

The researcher's role and challenges as a mediator were identified and illustrated at all levels of the collaborative research process; the co-situational, co-operative and co-productual stages. It is important to remember that the prefix "co" did not mean that all components of the research process must be developed and undertaken by both the researcher and the practitioner. The researcher's challenge in the partnership established between the researcher and practitioner in collaborative research was to consider preoccupations coming from the practical and research communities during all stages of the research project. Through mediation, collaborative research in education brought together public school and university cultures in order to create a common culture where practitioners and the researcher merged theory and practice to co-construct knowledge of an educational event. The arts/language interdisciplinary research project seemed to illustrate the mediation of these two cultures.

The mediation of the worlds of research and practice cause us to question the meaning of the reinvestment of research into practice. Should research coming from the "scholar" be assumed by the practitioner? Consequently, should research precede practice, or knowledge precede action? In fact, Schön (1983) critiques what constitutes "professional knowledge." He believes that theory and practice are co-constructed and that knowledge and action are in constant interaction. Collaborative research seems to support Schön's theory. The researcher, in educational collaborative research reinvests into the practitioner's world by being in constant dialogue and negotiation with the practical world to co-construct knowledge that will be beneficial to both school (professional develop-
ment) and university (contribution to research) cultures. Consequently, theory and practice seem to merge to constitute "professional knowledge." This is the ultimate goal and challenge of the researcher as mediator in collaborative research.

REFERENCES


Alexandria, VA: Association for supervision and curriculum development.


