Action Research for Inclusive Education: Reflections on Changing Practices

VVOB’s Action Research Model

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• National representative surveys and studies (Africa Check, 2018; PIRLS, 2016; TIMSS-N, 2015; Timeaus et al. 2013) have highlighted some of the challenges faced by South African learners this include:
  • Poor literacy and numeracy skills
  • High drop out rates
  • High rates of grade repetition
  • Barriers to learning created by poor socioeconomic outcomes

• Studies have also pointed out to intra school variables that may contribute to poor education outcomes particularly in low resource contexts (Timeaus et al. 2013)

• Therefore the key role of office based educators in supporting school based educators has to be strengthened in order to promote learner centered approaches to teaching and learning.
Motivation

• Bantwin and King -Mc Kenzin (2011) point out that the role of the district office are pivotal in capacity – building at school level.
• However, Mavuso (2013) argues that the support received by school-based educators by district-based supporters is inadequate.
• Action Research is one of the CD trajectories employed by VVOB in support of office based educators.
Action research in education is a process in which participants examine their own educational practice systematically and carefully, using the techniques of research (Ferrance, 2000).

AR in Education assists the educator to adopt self-reflective strategies about their work and take informed actions to solve identified problems (Mills, 2011; McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 1996).

As implied in the term action, it is envisaged that office based educators will begin a cycle of posing questions, gathering data, reflection, and deciding on a course of action in order to change their practice and therefore improve the school environment.
VVOB’s Role

Motivation

• To support quality of education in SA by providing technical assistance to the department of education.

• The support given by VVOB promotes inclusive pedagogy, collaboration and the use of self reflection in improving the quality of education.

• In order to support teachers and school leaders to reflect about their roles and implement inclusive pedagogy strategies VVOB supports Circuit Managers; Subject Advisors and Learning Support Advisors by enrolling them in an Action Research Learning Trajectory (ARLT).
Valuing learner diversity
Learner difference is considered as a resource and asset to education
Objectives of the Study

To share insights into the process and results of a completed action research learning trajectory in the Free State Province. By answering the following Key Questions based on the Kirkpatrick model:

• What is the response of the participants to the AR workshops?
• What are the effects of participation in an Action Research learning trajectory by district officials on how they implement their role when they support teachers and school leaders?
• What are the effects of participation in an Action Research learning trajectory by district officials on inclusive education practices in schools?
• To which aspects of the learning trajectory can these effects be attributed to according to province officials and district officials?
• The Kirkpatrick framework is a model used to evaluate the effectiveness of training and educational programmes.
• The Kirkpatrick model provides a means to assess training programs and improve their outcomes while at the same time benefiting both the trainer and the participant.
  ➢ Reaction
  ➢ Learning
  ➢ Behaviour
  ➢ Results
Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model

- **Level 1 Reaction**: How did participants respond to the training?
- **Level 2 Learning**: How much did participants learn from the training and have their skills improved?
- **Level 3 Behavior**: Have participants applied what they learned from the training?
- **Level 4 Results**: What benefits has the organization experienced as a result of the training?
• VVOB is supporting FSDoE and KZNDOE officials through the ARLT to investigate the effectiveness of their own practice in supporting teachers and school leaders so that they can provide quality learning for all.

• From April 2018 – March 2019 VVOB enrolled a total of 29 volunteering district officials and subject advisors from the Free State Department of Education (FSDoE) of which 23 completed the learning trajectory.
Three methods of applying AR in education:

- **Critical Action Research**: also referred to as emancipatory action research. It promotes a shared democratic commitment to seek new knowledge and to break away from traditional bureaucratic traditions for reform and social improvement.

- **Technical Action Research**: Action research that incorporates a scientific approach to problem solving.

- **Practical Action Research**: in which the researcher focuses on the “how-to” and “how do I” research questions --- VVOB’s approach.
Methodology | **VVOB’s action research learning cycle**

Workshop 1  Workshop 2  Workshop 3  Workshop 4
- The learning trajectory consists of 4 face to face workshops
- Action phases of two to three months
- In addition to face to face – Support Mechanism
  - coaching and mentorship
A mixed method approach was used to collect evaluation data focusing on participatory methods.

- Workshop Evaluation: Workshop Evaluation Forms
- In-depth Interviews: Semi Structured Questionnaire
- Participatory Interviews (by participants): Evidence Forms
Sampling Strategy

Methodology

• Workshop Evaluation: 20 participants completed the workshop evaluation form.
• In-depth Interviews: Convenience sample of 9 participants interviewed.
  • Saturation method used to select sample size
• Evidence Collection Form: Administered by participants to their chosen intervention sample. A convenience sampling was used.
• VVOB supports office based educators in order to promote inclusive pedagogy and diversity for learning.
  • Result level 4 (Kirkpatrick) will not be included in this analysis as VVOB does not support schools and learners directly.

• Interview data subject to reporting bias (self-reported data)
  • Triangulation used where possible
# Alignment with Kirkpatrick

## Data sources and levels of evaluation matrix

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Questionnaires</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Evidence forms</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Reaction</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2. Learning</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3. Behavior</strong></td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td><strong>4. Results</strong></td>
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Data Analysis

• Workshop Evaluation Forms: a four point Likert scale (agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree) was used to analyse workshop evaluation forms.

• Interview Transcripts: Semi Structured Interviews analysed using thematic analysis

• Evidence Form: Evidence from supported teachers and school leaders with regards to teachings and learning practices in the schools. Analysed using thematic analysis.
A total of 20 participants participated in the evaluation.
• Out of 23 participants a total of 18 submitted their collected evidence forms.
• Together the 18 participants engaged with a total of 73 respondents (school based):

<table>
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<th>Designation</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>44</td>
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<tr>
<td>HODs</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>73</td>
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RESULTS | Reaction (Result Level 1)

Satisfaction with the Learning Trajectory

- I am satisfied with the content of the AR workshops: 24.49, 75.51
- I am satisfied with the methodologies used during the AR workshops: 36.73, 63.27
- The inclusive education framework is useful in guiding my research: 41.18, 58.82
- The action learning cycle is useful in guiding my research: 50, 50
- The AR process is relevant to my work: 21.65, 78.35
- Total: 34.81, 65.19

Bar chart showing satisfaction levels with various aspects of the learning trajectory.
• knowledge, skills and attitudes actually acquired by the participant due to training.
“One thing we have emphasised now is that learners are different. When you teach them, you must take that into account. You must teach them differently in terms of their own learning styles. That is what is key for us.” [Male CM]
“Because I’ve been doing research a lot in my life and sometimes nothing comes from it now. I’ve got the information but now I learned that if you do research you must use that research in bettering whatever you research...” (Female, SA)

“Before I go and train people, I issue out something like a questionnaire which will actually help me to identify the areas of developments for people I want to train. I want to hear from them. Where should I support you?” (Male, CM)
“I feel more confident now than before because I now realize I don’t have to come with a bag of solutions but my role is to facilitate the process to get educators to discover solutions on their own.” (Male, CM)

“Action Research has taught me to accommodate all type of intelligence from different people. And to be able to deal with them and not to draw my conclusion like before” [Female SA]

“What I learned from somewhere else, it is that we all can learn from each other, from one another. That is what I benefited about that.” (Female SA)
“Reflecting on the actions taken has an impact on my learning as well as the school management team members, because they also indicated that they were not aware that what they were doing is not correct” (Female, DCES)

“That is the most important because when you reflect on your practice you are there to improve…. I can see that really, it is about the progress, now.” (Male, CES)

“Action Research taught me to, in everything that I do, I have to start with myself first. The I part of it, what is it that I’m doing?” (Female, SA)
Level 3 of Kirkpatrick Model is about monitoring actual behaviors that were demonstrated by the officials after the AR learning trajectory at the workplace.

Some participants indicate that they are now engaging more with teachers and school leaders instead of imposing and prescribing what to do. Other participants note that they have moved away from being an expert towards being a practitioner, finding solutions together with school leaders and teachers.
“Action Research helped to change me personally as a Subject Advisor. Now I manage to see my mistakes also. The problem was not just with the educators. The problem was with how we were supporting them. We were not reaching them and were somehow not even aware there is a gap between us and them.” [Female SA]

“In future now, when I go to other schools, I always ask the teachers themselves to identify the problem, to come with suggestions or recommendations and together with them, we have strategy in place. I only come to give them support.” [Male CES]

“…we started by us realising that we need each other in this journey to be able to support each other and the good thing that happened is that initially it was only inclusive education and the circuit manager, school management, management and governance, but later on the subject of bursars who were not part of the Action Research trajectory, learnt from somewhere on one platform that there is this kind of Action Research that is going on, and they decided to join the PLC even though that they are not doing the research, they actual research themselves, they will be starting now in June 2019.” [DCES]
Evidence forms were used by participants to collect evidence on the effectiveness of their own practices to support schools. More specifically, participants investigated what worked in their support to teachers or school leaders, and why it worked.
Evidence on improved support practices by Subject Advisors and Learning Support Advisors

- Regular school visits
- Individual attention in the classroom
- Easy ways of communicating (e.g. via WhatsApp)
- Outlining the importance and necessity of policies
- Motivating teachers to gain more knowledge, skills and experience in their jobs
- Stimulating collaboration and peer-to-peer learning amongst teachers
- Change in Attitude

“Lesson study where we had a presenter doing division by grouping and sharing in fractions. It worked because we observed each other as teachers and some methods are easy.” [Mathematics teacher]

“The non-judgmental approach in which you conducted our meetings really worked for me.” [Grade 3 teacher]

“What I do differently because of your support, [LSA], is I actually prepare my lessons in a more effective way. I remember your saying of I must prepare with my retained learners in mind, so I must have different extra activities for the learners who work faster and the learners who are special as you would like to call it” [Foundation phase teacher]
Evidence on improved support practices by Circuit Managers

- Bringing different stakeholders together
- Supporting collaboration within the district
- Outlining the importance and necessity of policies
- Promoting sharing stories / freedom of expression
- Being able to listen and probing questions to get to the core of issues
- Being respectful, patient and perceptive
- Emphasizing knowledge and skills of stakeholders

“Firstly, the issues you raised with us were spot on. We needed to be supported on those issues. Secondly, your probing questions contributed greatly to the unpacking of issues. Despite your knowledge, you are down to earth and respected us throughout.” [School Governing Body (SGB) member]

“It worked because there is a shared purpose and common understanding. The educators and SMT do appreciate the need for quality teaching and learning for the benefit of learners.” [SMT member]
Conclusion

The VVOB ARLT has been widely accepted by office based educators as an important tool for PD, enabling participants to reflect and change their practice.

Participants gained knowledge of AR concepts.

Indication of change in behavior (reported by supported educators)

- self-reflection
- Active learning
- Dialogue and collaboration
- receiving and giving feedback
- Establishing a Professional Learning Committee (PLC)

Supported educators and school leaders confident in their roles and are adopting new strategies.
• Demonstrated that the Kirkpatrick evaluation framework can be applied to an AR learning trajectory
  • Result level four requires data collection at the school level
Recommendations

• Collection of school level data in order to measure the impact of the intervention at a learner level.
• Training of school-based educators on action research.
• Including Budding System in the learning trajectory
• Including department of education (Teacher Development) in co-facilitation of AR in order to promote the institutionalization of AR
• Mentorship and Coaching provided by previous AR
• Use of participatory data collection methods for AR
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THANK YOU