Participatory research in a school setting: a process of acculturation

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Context

- Mission of schools: success of students
- Major issue: reading problems of young elementary school children
- In one French language school board in Ontario: 48% of 10 yr old students have reading problems
- Key to success : phonological awareness
- Strategy: to train grade 1 teachers and examine the impact on reading achievement

Objective

- Showcase how a collaborative study proceeds…with the participants

- **Research questions**:
  1. At the start of the study, how do the teachers view phonological awareness and subsequent to the training how does this view change?
  2. What pedagogical practices are they planning to implement?

Researcher stance

- Away from a traditional outsider perspective (ie. assessing the impact of training)
- Towards a collaborative perspective (ie. reflect together on how to modify our practices)
- **Result** :
- A concerted collective reflection on actions involving researchers and teachers (action research approach)
- Collaborative inquiry: being in a research mindset (Richardson, 1994) and forming a partnership

Methodology

- **Training workshop** : 3 ½ days, 1 day / month
  - Trainers : speech-pathologist and ressource teacher
  - Content: phonological awareness strategies and comprehension strategies
  - Participants practice strategies in between sessions
- **Researchers as observers**
- Data collection using **Social Analysis Systems (SAS²) techniques** :
  - The **socratic wheel** (1st and last day of training the last day of training: associated with first research question
  - The **rainbow** (last day of training)

www.sas-pm.com or www.sas2.net

The socratic wheel

- A rating technique used in the field of participatory research to visualize and compare multiple ratings : current rating, expected rating and final rating
- What makes it socratic?   *now I know that I do not know*
- In our study :
  - knowledge of phonological awareness before and after training
- Two components : data table and graph

Data table

Graph

The rainbow

- A technique that helps
  - identify means required by key actors involved in a core problem
  - Visualize actors who may affect a course of action and actors who may be affected by it
- In our study :
- At the end of training, how to implement phonological awareness activities in the classroom
- Two criteria : **time** (short, middle and long term) and **control** (control or no control)

Findings

The socratic wheel:

- BEFORE TRAINING - solid knowledge base
- AFTER TRAINING - <u>Declarative knowledge reinforced</u>
- « *I learned the exact terms for what I was teaching* »)
- « *I can now explain more clearly and justify my practices* »
  <u>Improved theoretical understanding</u>
- « I have been exposed to new strategies, and
- « I will modify my practices in order to better use the new strategies I have learned »

The rainbow:

- Participants chose mostly short-term courses of action under the control of the school board.
- They decided to revise their actions and identify what they can regulate themselves
- Two actions were prominent:
  - to experiment all of the strategies learned
  - a desire to work with others, to form communities of practice

Conclusion

- Limitation 1: sporadic presence of researchers in the training sessions impeded collaborative perspective
- Limitation 2: compulsory participation of teachers in training posed an ethical problem for the study
- **Contribution**: The socratic wheel and the rainbow are excellent tools that generate a rich interpretation of teachers' beliefs and practices

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