CHAPTER 10

Is action research about developing individual approaches to help young dropouts valid? — A Position Paper

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ABSTRACT

I argue that participatory action research (PAR) is valid in a quality-based research project about dropouts, in small groups with an individual approach. All research must be thorough in data collection but PAR must be especially careful to add other voices to the research, and not only tell the story as the researcher experiences it. Different theories of validation in PAR are discussed, and finally I put forward some criteria and guidelines that must be followed to ensure a higher recognition of the validation among the research community. Research on dropouts is difficult to plan because of the need to adapt the work methods and the pedagogy in the process to the young person. Even in these individual approaches it is important for the research community to see good, valid examples documented in a thorough way so that they can be trusted.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a position stand for research on small groups of dropouts using different methods of data collection connected to action research. The term validation is sometimes used in qualitative research but often replaced with terms like truth, value and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Some researchers still believe that valid is a better term because:

> the term validity offers immediate recognition and understanding within the scientific community [...] Validity is broadly defined as "the state or quality of being sound, just, and well-founded" (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001, p. 527)

Leung L (2015, p. 325) defined validity in qualitative research as "appropriateness" of the tools, processes, and data. He continued: "Whether the research question is valid for the desired outcome, the choice of methodology is appropriate for answering the research question, the design is valid for the methodology, the sampling and data analysis is appropriate, and finally the results and conclusions are valid for the sample and context."

I think it is important to use the term "valid" in qualitative research and not let this be something used exclusively for quantitative research. I will use some examples from my own ongoing Ph.D. project on dropouts, and connect this to other researchers that have been working with this topic of validity. Finally, I will try to present a checklist for validity in action research projects.

RESEARCH ON SMALL GROUPS

Qualitative research has often been related to small groups and this is maybe one of the main differences from quantitative research that normally has a large pool of participants from which to gather data. One of the main challenges in working with small groups is to conduct the research in a way that it can be understood and trusted by other researchers using other methods. Whilst quantitative research can give the percentage of dropouts in schools, qualitative research can give information about the distinct nuances among young people that drop out, giving some indication as to why they gave up on school. This is not possible in quantitative research with its generalizations. For me, it is important that both these research approaches are seen as valid. Subjective data has its own value, and stories from young people experiencing difficult years as dropouts are also important data.

Action research is a part of this contribution to qualitative research. It is not a method but it is an approach, a way of working that differs greatly in how the research process is done. One problem has been that many researchers have made their own version of Action Research. I have chosen to look at contributions from great researchers in the community of quality researchers in the same "tradition" as Elliot (1991), Carr & Kemmmis (1986), Reason & Bradbury (2008), Hiim (2010) and my main focus has been on McNiff (2017). Several researchers using Action Research face distrust concerning the question of the validity of their research. It is important to discuss some of these arguments. I agree with some of the concerns raised by critics in how some action researchers are failing

to prove their validity. This paper will try to position my understanding of the validity of research on small groups with action research.

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (PAR)

Some of the researchers in this tradition do not use the word "participatory" in front of "Action Research." For me this is a very important word, and I position my understanding of Action Research to strongly involve participation from and with others.

I will start with a definition of PAR from Reason & Bradbury (2001, p. 1):

> A participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview … [and bringing] together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and communities.

For me it is important that at least four parts must be included in a definition of PAR: 1) Participation with others in research, 2) Collaboration in work, 3) Individual approach related to actions taken, and 4) Action and reflection together. This definition from Reason & Bradbury (2001) includes more, and other scholars bring in other topics, but these four parts have been instrumental for why I have chosen to work with this approach. It is important to consider that I, as a researcher, am not alone in the research – I need assistance from students, co-workers and other participants, as well as other researchers, to do a good job in PAR through collaboration. I also think that it is essential that these four parts should be documented with good methods of data collection that include the "voice" of every participant ensuring that both positive and negative experiences appear. I will come back to this discussion later when I look at validity in PAR.

McNiff encourages teachers to undertake simple "practitionary research", "teacher attempts" or developmental work. One's own practical work is documented, reflected and displayed to other professionals. McNiff is clear that "action" is something other than "work" and "labor", which she believes are the 3 parts that make up a "teacher's work" (McNiff, 2017). She clarifies the expectations of such work by saying "you state the reasons and the purposes for

your actions [...] thinking becomes a main form of action" (McNiff, 2017, p. 19). Reason & Bradbury (2008, p. 14) have a similar definition: "Action research is a participatory process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice..."

One should not attempt to prove anything, but rather state that there are reasonable grounds for supporting one's claim to knowledge. McNiff (2017) believes that one's "diary" notes, emails and other notes created when learning something new must be considered as data in such a process. As to what others have learned, it is important to prompt them to tell stories of how they acquired new knowledge through your teaching. Following this one needs to reflect and analyze. Elliot (1991, p. 13) shows us examples of "how to facilitate the professional learning of teachers through action research [...] a process of reflectively analyzing his experience."

My experience is that PAR has the possibility to give answers to more questions than just those connected to learning, just as Eikeland (2012, p. 270) discussed the "surplus value":

> In general, action research needs to be more explicit about its theoretical and research methodological prospects, pretensions, and ambitions, and in what ways it can deliver 'surplus value' compared with other research methods.

As a researcher I am obliged to make my research "true", but do I need to use the term "valid." I think that Whitehead & McNiff (2006, p. 2), pointed out something important:

> The practitioner research community needs now to do serious work on identifying its own criteria and standards of judgement to show both that they know what quality means in action research and also that they are capable of articulating those standards and producing theories that stand the test of the standards in achieving originality, significance and rigor.

Reason & Bradbury (2008) discussed the same challenge and argued that it is not useful to use validity as a measure in all research. They argued that a key dimension of quality is to be aware of one's choices, and to make those choices clear, transparent and well-articulated to yourselves, to your inquiry partners,

and, when you start writing and presenting, to the wider world. "This is akin to the 'crafting' of research that Kvale (1995) advocates [...] away from 'validity as policing' toward 'incitement to dialogue'" (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 7).

Before I go on discussing the validity of PAR, I will give some details of my own Ph.D. project. At the end of the paper, I will try to show how this challenge of validity has been of great importance to me.

MY PH.D. PAR ON DROPOUTS

I am conducting an action research project on a vocational didactic program in a training office in the sales profession. The project is for young people who have dropped out of high school after one or two years. The goal is to achieve the motivation to learn through practical challenges without experiencing it as a school. In my vocational didactic program, it will nevertheless be important to include Math, English, ICT, the environment and Social Studies as I believe these are included in the skills needed to become a good sales worker, as well as an active and conscious citizen. The students will attend 2-6 weeks full time in my training office to learn the basics of behavior at work, and some subjects related to sales. One important aspect is to learn values concerning time, appointments and the value of money and assets that are necessary in a job. The leader in the company needs to know that the young person will arrive at the right time and be able to take some responsibility. After these weeks with basic training, the youngster will work four days a week in a company related to sales. I will attempt to find companies with some products or services that are interesting for the young person. Motivation for education is better when the young people can relate to the tasks involved in their work. It is also an important goal to spend time discussing real work tasks with the leader in the company, and other goals for training related to sales work.

VALIDITY IN PAR

Fundamental to conceptualizing validity in PAR is the challenge of how to make judgements about the quality of the research. Altrichter et al. (1993, p. 74-81) argued that four key questions should be considered when formulating criteria to evaluate AR quality:

> Have the understandings gained from research been cross-checked against the perspectives of all those concerned and/or against other researchers? Have the

> understandings gained from research been tested through practical action? Are the research aims compatible with both educational aims and democratic human values? Are the research design and data-collection methods compatible with the demands of teaching?

Karen Watkins (1991) discussed Argyris and Schon's (1991) view on this. They noted that appropriate rigor also involves a critical test of the claims of the researcher.

> Perhaps the interventions "work" because other conditions in the context (e.g. financial exigency) force them to and hence they are not likely to work again in other contexts. They call for, at a minimum, an operational description of what the researcher actually did, and a critical reflection on the claims or attributions he or she makes about the achievements of the process. In this way, the research can be replicated and competing explanations (the negative case example) may be examined for the research results. (Watkins, 1991, p. 7)

I find these criteria very interesting, because I believe that action research must also be able to be replicated to check if other explanations could be possible for the findings.

Stephen Kemmis looked to Habermas and his way of talking about validity.

> The four most important presuppositions are (a) publicity and inclusiveness: no one who could make a relevant contribution with regard to a controversial validity claim must be excluded; (b) equal rights to engage in communication: everyone must have the same opportunity to speak to the matter at hand; (c) exclusion of deception and illusion: participants have to mean what they say; and (d) absence of coercion: communication must be free of restrictions that prevent the better argument from being raised or from determining the outcome of the discussion. (Habermas in Kemmis, 2008, p. 127)

It is difficult to consider whether a project is valid or not, especially based on one or two researchers working with only one or two young people in an individual approach. To do such a job there must be some criteria. Firstly, simply spending 12 months working with a person does not qualify a researcher to take or advise the appropriate actions. The first criteria must be external validity through a critical

friend (Stenhouse, 1975) and a resource group where one could discuss findings, or a conference to which one invites fellow researchers to discuss one's findings. If there would have been room in this article, I would have included material about "Future workshop," which I admire. In this text it will only be possible to include a short comment from Nielsen (2006, p. 112): "The social experiments related both to Search Conferences and Future Workshops clearly includes, an ambition of external validity of their results and of analytical generalization."

The SAGE handbook of Action Research has several articles that relate to validation in PAR. In one article Heinz Moser proposes some criteria that I think would be important:

> The first one was transparency, which meant that all the participants were able to trace the whole process of the PAR, its functions, aims and methods. The second criterion was compatibility of the aims with the methods and means with which they are reached. The researcher who participates in research with the community cannot claim the traditional researcher's distance and thus have a view as an independent observer. Thirdly, the participant researcher should be able to claim that she knows the situation better than does any outside observer and that she has honestly set forth all the aspects of which she had become aware. (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 43)

Another version of criteria is based on the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985), adapted to a use in PAR without using the concept of validity (Watkins, 1991, p. 15).

1) Trustworthiness/Usability: How can we both establish confidence in the research finding while developing both action and research skills among participants and ensuring that the solution works in context?
2) Relevancy/Applicability in Context. How do we determine the relevance of findings to the needs of the problem context?
3) Dependability/Competency. To what extent are we able to determine the adequacy of the process and are problems solved in a manner that permits ongoing learning of the individual or system?
4) Normative/Reductive: How consistent are procedures and outcomes with the normative theory guiding the research? In other words, do participants learn, are situations transformed as predicted by the theory?

I consider these useful points as practical tools in my own research. However, I will discuss some critical comments on these points. Eikeland (2006, 2012) had several, especially regarding trustworthiness. He referred to Mishler's (1990, p. 420) conclusion that "validation is the social discourse through which trustworthiness is established." He is totally against this idea that validity can be reduced to just any such social discourse. Eikeland (2006, p. 41) said:

> …that the primary purpose of an action research process is hardly to find out whether whatever is said also gets done either … but rather to find out whether what actually gets done (or not done) by Action Researchers and others, is also what is said, not "covered up" is some way by language. In order to secure validity, research processes must be opened up, not covered up.

Eikeland was very concerned with openness before and throughout the research: "Action research is normative, and requires […] its own preconditions" (Eikeland, 2006, p. 38). He also used two expressions to show the difference between working "onstage" and critical reflection "backstage." He thinks that it is vital to show both these parts for any organization that wants to make a valid PAR project:

> …on stage, we perform our roles and appointed tasks. Backstage, we discuss and analyze critically experiences from performing on stage, we practice to improve, we switch roles and plays, etc. Thus the action research cycles shifting between reflecting and acting receive organizational form. (Eikeland, 2006, p. 38)

Howe and Eisenhart (1990, p. 3) commented that research must be "anchored wholly within the process of inquiry"." Another question is: "Are warranted conclusions obtained about some important educational questions?" (ibid, p. 6). Watkins (1991, p. 14) also gave some questions that all PAR researchers should ask themselves before and after doing their work:

> Was it reflexive and dialectical? Was it ethical and collaborative? Did participants learn new research skills, attain greater self-understanding, or achieve greater self-determination? Did it solve significant practice problems or did it contribute to our knowledge about what will not solve those problems? Were problems solved in a manner that enhanced the overall learning capacity of the individuals or system?

To strengthen my argument in that PAR with dropouts could be valid, I will propose to do some additional work with the data collection and the presentation, based on an idea I studied from the Allan Feldman (2003) article on validity in self-study, which is a research form with many similarities to PAR. The first criterion is important because it generally encourages a researcher to use several ways of collecting data. Not only in logs, reflections, minutes from meetings and other written texts, but also film, video and installations and pictures that could show some of the process :

> Extend triangulation beyond multiple sources of data to include explorations of multiple ways to represent the same self-study. Because one data set can lead to a variety of representations it is important to show why one has been chosen over the others … However, multiple representations that support and challenge one another can add to our reasons to believe and trust the self-study. (ibid, p. 4)

The last criterion is possibly the most important:

> Provide evidence of the value of the changes in our ways of being teacher educators. As I have discussed, self-study is a moral and political activity. If a self-study were to result in a change in the researcher's way of being a teacher or teacher educator, then there should be some evidence of its value. A presentation of this evidence can help to convince readers of the study's validity. (ibid, p. 4)

When transferring this approach to PAR, the greatest evidence of my research being valid should then be the results I can show from a presentation of the results in text, but also on video, film and pictures published on internet where the young people have an opportunity to explain how their lives have changed.

Watkins (1991) referrers to Argyris criteria of generalizability of the knowledge.

> If action research is going to be accepted as science, validity criteria will have to demonstrate validity in both action and research communities. Only Argyris appears to do this in that he adds to the preceding criteria the idea of generalizability of the knowledge produced in action research, specifically the knowledge of intervention or of interpersonal action. (Watkins, 1991, p. 8)

IMPORTANCE OF EPISTEMOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY WHEN WE DISCUSS VALIDATION

The search for validity in PAR made me interested in the connection between epistemology, methodology and ontology as a basis for all research.

> The methodology justifies the methods used, which are the practical activities of research: sampling, data collection, data management, data analysis, and reporting. These concepts are interconnected: epistemology influences and justifies methodology, which again influences and justifies methods, and methods produce knowledge, which means that methodologies have epistemic content. (Helskog, 2014, p. 16)

My human vision, and my epistemology will ultimately be what determines my methods. I have so far worked with 8 unique people who each have their own story, but they have many common features. As an action researcher, I know each one of them very well. They might call me in the middle of the night and ask if I can lend them money to pay-off a debt. They use all the "tricks in the book" to avoid practicing or working towards an exam. How should I evaluate their development and my efforts in helping them? A test with criteria to find a score could have measured their performance before and after they got help in my project, but I believe that it is ethically immoral to set the same requirements for pre and post tests on those who struggle in many ways in life. The question is really what I should test and why, if it does not help them to get a job.

For a long time I thought that every research method would give the same type of answers, but Carter and Little (2008) gave an overview and a model of how epistemology influences the relationship between the researcher and the participant, they commented: "Epistemology profoundly shapes the researcher's conceptualization of the participant in data collection and analysis."(ibid, p. 8). They discussed a situation where the research would be done very differently only out of the epistemological way of thinking between two professors advising their students: " He *(the professor)* is more likely to encourage her *(the researcher)* to interact freely with them *(the young people that are research on)*, to be herself, within the constraints of what is ethically and socially appropriate, to form a caring relationship with them, to allow the unexpected to happen, and to be alert to multiple ways of seeing." (ibid, p. 8 explanations in parenthesis). They also explained how another professor with another epistemological view instructs

his students differently, and gets totally different results. I have through these examples understood that the results, and also the validity of the research would depend on how I must thoroughly explain both my methodological and epistemological stand.

Can validity be used when measuring human dignity, joy, expectations of life, care and quality of life? It is important to point out that no researcher who would sit for a week, or 10 weeks, with us to look at me and my students would have the same level of insight as I have after working closely together with them professionally for 12 months. So what must I do to be respected and understood as a researcher with valid research? I could say that my research is correct, recognizable, real, relevant and of high quality, but is that enough? After working with this paper, I have found that "validity" is really not the problem – it is about doing things the right way. Kvale (2007, p. 4) said that "Validation rests on the quality of the researcher's craftsmanship throughout an investigation, continually checking, questioning and theoretically interpreting the findings."

PAR IS OFTEN A HOLISTIC APPROACH THAT MAKES VALIDATION EVEN MORE DIFFICULT

The question is then really what would be regarded as criteria for validation for a researcher "walking" with people in everyday life. Traditionally a distance to the person researched to maintain objectivity is a core value. If an action researcher should follow the criteria on distance it would not be possible to do PAR. But if the criteria were more general, such as the right use of research methods, then validity in my view should be possible. We must accept that walking with a person through a landscape, and not just walking, but also choosing to be together with them and other persons, makes the researcher not only a part of the journey, but also a guide in the journey. In PAR one of the core values is that the researcher is a person with professional knowledge. This means that the researcher works in landscapes that are well known. As a professional he can lead the person he is helping not only by choices that this person "feels" are right, but the researcher can use his professional judgement to discuss with the person which choices are possible, and through this process help them to make a choice based on the options that the professional has made clear. This kind of counselling is well known to PAR researchers (cf. The World Bank participation sourcebook, World Bank 1996) and it gives the research quite a different outcome than it would if the researcher had only listened to the subject, and just followed their way

through the landscape. A mathematic calculation would show us that even after just 5 different choices, there are actually several hundred "paths" that could be taken. The action researcher should have a high formal education, but even with much experience they should work together with other well-trained people in other professions. This is possibly also one of the strengths of PAR – looking at people in a holistic way (World Bank, 1996). This would mean that we would not separate a problem area into different disciplines, but we would try to find people from different disciplines to cooperate in solving one problem. This would mean that when we arrive at a place in the "landscape" where we understand that knowledge about learning is not enough, we would try to work together with other professional people, get them to help us find the right path, and to find several choices again to help the person.

Regarding validation, this would mean that we, in a holistic way of working, would be better off understanding one person's problem in a "true" way than another researcher looking at one theoretical detail of a large problem area.

FINDINGS: A LIST WITH 10 DIFFERENT CHECKPOINTS TO MAKE PAR VALID

In this position paper I have tried to show how important it is for PAR to show the "backstage" and also be transparent about its process. I have looked at many different views on validity and found that it is possible to claim that the work is valid as long as one follows some important "rules" or checkpoints. Validity is not only related to quality of data but to the whole research process. Since it has been difficult for me to find this list of checkpoints in one place, I have created the following new list from the theory presented above. I have reduced it to 10 checkpoints that I believe will be valuable to me in my further research and I hope this list will be of help to others also.

1) Transparency: All the participants are able to trace the whole process of the PAR, its functions, aims and methods.
2) Perspective: Have the understandings gained from the research been cross-checked against the perspectives of all those concerned and/or against other researchers?
3) Relevancy: How do we determine the relevance of findings to the needs of the problem in context? Are the research design and data-collection methods

compatible with the demands? Is there compatibility of the aims with the methods and means with which they are reached?

4) Values: Are the research aims compatible with both educational aims and democratic human values?
5) Professionalism: The researcher who participates in research with the community cannot claim the traditional researcher's distance and thus have a view as an independent observer. He/she should be able to claim that he/she knows the situation better than any outside observer and that he/she has honestly set forth all the aspects of which he/she had become aware.
6) Ethical: Was it ethical and did it give equal rights to engage in communication: everyone must have the same opportunity to speak to the matter at hand; reflexive and dialectical.
7) Triangulation input and output of data: Extend triangulation beyond multiple sources of data to include explorations of multiple ways to represent the same study. Present results in text, but also on video, film, pictures and social media with explanations of how lives have been changed.
8) Open research: We must find out whether what actually gets done (or not done) by Action Researchers and others, is also what is said, and this it has not been "covered up" in some way. How consistent are the procedures and outcomes with the normative theory guiding the research? A criterion must be external validity through a critical friend, and a resource group that one could discuss findings with or a conference where fellow researchers are invited to discuss your findings.
9) Practical test: Does the "solution" work in context? Have the understandings gained from the research been tested through practical action? Did it solve significant practice problems or did it contribute to our knowledge about what will not solve those problems?
10) Learning outcome: To what extent are we able to determine the adequacy of the process and are problems solved in a manner that permits ongoing learning of the individual or system? Are situations transformed as predicted by the theory? Did participants learn new research skills, attain greater self-understanding, or achieve greater self-determination?

These checkpoints will not only help the research to be valid, but it will also help us to remember the great responsibility we have in working with people that we often meet in problematic situations. We must never be tempted to use

people to prove our research questions, but we must work together with them to help them in a democratic way so that their voice can be heard. For me this is a core value in PAR.

We must also remember that all qualitative research has its problems with validation in several ways, for example the small number of people that are involved. Quantitative research can also struggle with validation sometimes – even if their schemes and questions are thoroughly worked out, there might be misunderstandings, or mistrust by the person answering. All research must live with this challenge that even if we think we are well-prepared and have taken validation seriously, faults can appear because of cultural misunderstanding, problems concerning power questions, and sometimes because people have no interest in the research.

IMPLICATIONS AND CHALLENGES IN MAKING MY PH.D. PROJECT VALID VS CHECKLIST

It is difficult to argue what the main reasons are for young people becoming dropouts, and which activities can help them get back "in the game." In my current work I have seen that for some youngsters it is important just to be seen as a person, and not as a problem. For other youngsters they only need some more practical examples from a real company to understand the theoretical principles of a textbook from school. Other youngsters will never understand all the theory that is necessary for a full "school" education in sales, however, a company would be able to teach all the skills that are needed to be an excellent employee.

I have tried to work with validation of my project in many ways. Each week, the students will attend an action research meeting where we consider what we have done the last week, and at the same time make plans for the next week based on the students' wishes, thoughts and what they have experienced. Similarly, the business leaders who are involved in the project will be invited to a breakfast meeting each month to offer their reflections on the project and, together with the students, agree on the work going forward. The actual data collection will last for about 12 months and through this time there will be 12 major actions of which the last 6 are only work related. The main focus of the data collection is to get feedback and work together with leaders and students to promote good vocational didactic programs in training offices and in business. I will also use an "expert group" of teachers and other people working on similar projects to comment and criticize my work three times throughout

the project. The goal of this group is to give inputs, from different perspectives than those of the participants and my coworkers. The framework for the project will be linked to the didactic relationship model (Hiim and Hippe, 2001) where the participants and I will discuss the different parts of each action. It is also important in the data collection to get the participants to a reflect on Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) 5-step model for vocational competence as well as theories from Lave and Wenger (1991) on Communities of Practice.

The main challenge in my work is not to find practical ways to teach these different youngsters how to become a salesperson. The problem is more as a researcher to find a way to generalize other challenges and find ways to resolve them. Some of them are only minor "issues" that some unlucky youngsters have had in their childhood and that, in some cases, have never been understood by the school, but have become THE problem for the child. These problems are related to lack of trust in other people, difficulties in understanding social situations, problems related to anxiety and addiction. Some of the problems with "dropouts" can also be related to other learning disabilities, ADHD and other diagnoses (Rumberger, 2011). Still, most young people just need to have some extra time, a person that is willing to listen to what they say and a person that can be creative and find other solutions to learning than just reading a book.

I have tested the checklist that I have developed in my own practice and discovered failure in completion. This taught me valuable lessons in adjusting collection of data and practice moving forward in my research.

My challenge will be to bring other professionals into my work and discuss my findings with them in regular meetings throughout the project "Building the capacity to systematically alternate between performing "onstage", and reflecting critically "backstage", may challenge organizations stifled by routines and habits, or led by power and rhetoric. However, this is what research validity needs" (Eikeland, 2006).

These youngsters need individual help, and our problem as a society is that individual help is expensive and demands a great deal of resources. I will try, through my action research, to show that it is worth the extra efforts and costs to invest in these youngsters. I believe that my research will be valid even if I will not be able to generalize a group with dropouts as many do. I do not think it is right to generalize persons as subjects, but still it is possible to generalize some of their "attributes"; behaviors, problems, ways of acting, problem-solving methods and relationships to public systems such as school and health. In the

same way I will try to see if there are any ways of generalizing my methods for teaching, helping and guiding them.

Many action research studies appear to abort at the stage of diagnosis of a problem or the implementation of a single solution strategy, irrespective of whether or not it resolves the presenting problem (Watkins, 1991). In my research I would be very thorough in explaining the result of the PAR, showing the young people's stories, their "path" and the results together with my thoughts and theirs. To this we will also add discussions on what went wrong and other situations where we should have made other choices together, and situations where my professional judgement was not good enough. Watkins (1991) claimed that both validity of process and of outcome must be established. Her findings emphasize action over research, which is the major reason methodologists have tended to suggest that action research is not really research at all, but a kind of applied problem-solving process.

CONCLUSION

PAR struggles to be understood as a research approach with the possibilities to validate its work, and maybe researchers have themselves to blame as they have presented research without opening the "backstage" process. Another reason may be that the methodological and epistemological ideas have not been clarified. Some researchers have an idea that PAR is just telling the story of a researcher in Action. I have tried to show that good PAR work will need much (extra) work to qualify it as valid, but I am convinced that it is worth the extra effort. I have produced a checklist to try to assist myself and others to do a thorough job as a PAR researcher, so when my validity is challenged, I can refer to having used these 10 steps. It is important for me to show that my research on dropouts is valid in the same way as any other research on dropouts. This is my position.

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