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**RESEARCH AS LEARNING: THE REALITIES OF  
ACTION RESEARCH IN A NEW ZEALAND  
INDIVIDUALISED LEARNING PROGRAMME**

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy in Education at Massey University

JENNIFER MARY POSKITT

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## ABSTRACT

The thesis portrays an action research study of an individualised learning programme in a rural New Zealand secondary school. The study considers the nature of action research, individualised and cooperative learning programmes, and the role of innovation and reflection in a school undergoing change. "Achieve", the title of the programme, predominantly encompasses individualised learning although elements of cooperative learning are also included. The fundamental basis of the programme is developing student responsibility for their own learning.

The gap between the theoretical and the practical domains of the programme is exposed with students requiring considerable guidance in the transition from teacher-directed to self-directed learners. Various issues arise in the concepts of learning alone and together, the provision of choices and control, and the role of reflection and innovation in schools undergoing change. Inconsistent practices in developing students as independent learners are only made explicit through considerable observation, reflection and critical discourse.

Action research is the means through which teachers improve their understandings, situation and practices. However, at the outset, few teachers at this school were ready for action research. Reflective skills are activated and extended through a series of staff discussions, centring around observational and interview data. Teachers gradually become aware of inconsistent understandings and practices. With the involvement of an outside researcher their reflective capacities are developed, research comes to be valued and the quest for data stimulates the development of teachers' own research skills, and changes in the school culture. A three part developmental sequence is proposed for the involvement of outside researchers. It entails a progression from practical to theoretical phases.

Various principles and procedures of action research are questioned, among which are: that teachers are ready to and are sufficiently skilled to conduct action research projects, that all teachers are reflective on their practice, and that school cultures are conducive to action research. A tentative theory of readiness is proposed for schools not formerly exposed to action research. The three phases incorporate involvement in a second-order action research study. This enables participants to discern the value and relevance of research, to stimulate interest in and development of reflective research skills, and to develop a questioning inquiry for greater involvement in the research. Thus, a second-order study can be transformed into a first-order action research study, enabling the development of *teachers-as-researchers*.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Tables and Photographs	v
CHAPTER ONE	1
Introduction	1
Action Research	1
Individualised Learning	3
Cooperative Learning	5
Context of the Study	6
Summary	7
CHAPTER TWO - DESCRIPTION OF THE ACHIEVE PROGRAMME AT WHS	8
Introduction	8
Background of the Programme	8
What is Achieve?	9
Summary	16
CHAPTER THREE - REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH	17
Introduction	17
Notions of Individual Learning	18
Cooperative Learning	34
Change and Innovation	41
Reflection	47
Conclusion	49
CHAPTER FOUR - METHODOLOGY IN THEORY	50
Introduction	51
What are the Origins of Action Research?	51
What is Action Research and its Essential Principles?	55
What Procedures are Commonly Associated with Action Research?	66
Is Action Research a Standard Procedure Throughout the World?	70
What Contradictions Arise in Action Research?	74
Conclusion	83
CHAPTER FIVE - METHODOLOGY IN ACTION	84
Introduction	84
How did Action Research Evolve at WHS?	84
Which Action Research Principles were Fundamental to this Study?	95
What Action Research Procedures were Relevant?	99
How did it Differ From UK and Australian Studies?	103
Conclusion	104

CHAPTER SIX - FIVE CYCLES OF ACTION RESEARCH IN THE ACHIEVE PROGRAMME	106
Introduction	106
Cycle One	106
Cycle Two	120
Cycle Three	129
Cycle Four	139
Cycle Five	149
Conclusion	165
CHAPTER SEVEN - EMERGENT THEMES	167
Introduction	167
Understanding the Philosophy of Achieve	169
Learning Alone	169
Learning Together	178
Choice	179
Control	182
Conclusion	193
CHAPTER EIGHT - TOWARDS A READINESS THEORY OF ACTION RESEARCH	194
Introduction	194
Section One	194
Assumptions made in the Action Research Literature	194
Conflicting Principles of Action Research	204
Issues in Action Research	208
Section Two - Towards a Readiness Theory of Action Research	214
Rationale	214
Framework	215
Dilemmas and Challenges for Future Research	216
Conclusion	218
CHAPTER NINE - SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	219
BIBLIOGRAPHY	234
APPENDICES	
Appendix A - Example of Fieldnotes; Student Planning Sheet	247
Appendix B - WHS Achieve Feedback - May 1992	250
Appendix C - WHS Achieve Feedback - September 1992	255
Appendix D - WHS Achieve Feedback - November 1992	261
Appendix E - WHS Achieve Feedback - March 1993	269
Appendix F - WHS Achieve Feedback - October 1993	280
Appendix G - Summary of Teacher Interviews - November 1992	288
Appendix H - WHS Achieve Parent Survey 1993	292
Appendix I - Teacher Interview Developmental Trends	296

## LIST OF TABLES AND PHOTOGRAPHS

Table 6.1	First Teacher Interview Responses WHS - April 1992	116
Table 6.2	First Student Interview Responses WHS - March 1992	117
Table 6.3a	Time Event Sampling 23/7/1992	123
Table 6.3b	Analysis of Time Event Sampling	123
Table 6.4	Selected Questions from Teacher Interviews - August 1992	126
Table 6.5	Selected Questions from Student Interviews - August 1992	128
Table 6.6	Skills sought in Teacher Development	135
Table 6.7	Topics of Teacher Discussion and Recognisable Change	135
Table 6.8	Teacher Questions about Student Activity	135
Table 6.9	Discussion Points Considered by Teachers in Third Feedback Report	137
Table 6.10	Reasons why Students do not Work Harder	147
Table 6.11	Suggestions from Student Interviews for Changes in Achieve	156
Table 6.12a	Parent Survey Endorsement of Achieve Values	157
Table 6.12b	Parent Survey Uncertainty about Achieve	157
Table 6.13	Matrix Display of Trend Development during WHS Action Research Study	164
Photograph 1	Individual learning - students learning at different rates on varying mathematical topics	112
Photograph 2	Students working on individual tasks	112
Photograph 3	Teacher monitoring of student planning	113
Photograph 4	Group work - students working together on separate tasks	113