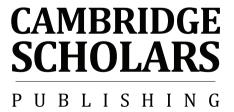# Resolving Classroom Management and School Leadership Issues in ELT

Resolving Classroom Management and School Leadership Issues in ELT: Action Research Reports from the United Arab Emirates

Edited by

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**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

FOREWORD

The idea for this book evolved from work undertaken during the MA TESOL course *English Language Teaching (ELT) Leadership and Management* at The American University of Sharjah.

Work on action research projects which involved attention to planning and documentation transferred considerable responsibility for management of progress and learning to the teachers undertaking the course. Problem solving discussions became part of the action research project, held during regular class time. This forum created accountability and enhanced the teachers' development of investigative strategies, improved their learning because of an increased awareness of thinking and generally increased their motivation. Improved levels of self-perception resulted; the social exchange environment of the regular discussions reflects aspects of Vygotsky's theory of socially mediated learning. The considerable capacity of action research to enable teachers to solve real-world problems so that they can subsequently handle complex problems in their own workplaces resulted from this work.

Publication of the investigations seemed the obvious consequence. Caroline Brandt has made this point very succinctly in the first chapter of the book.

> Given that, in order to complete the research cycle, the researcher is obliged to publish significant results, and given also that these emerging researchers are operating in a society that lacks published research and trained researchers, the expectation that this group should publish is clearly a case of *sine qua non*. (p. 9).

An integral part of the action research cycle is dissemination; the results need to be communicated. Publication allows the work of scholarship, the new knowledge and insights to be shared. Publication more importantly continues the work by making investigations and findings available to a wider audience. It is our hope that other teachers and researchers may find commonality or incentives that impact on their work from within the chapters of this publication.

CHAPTER ONE

MASTER'S STUDY:
THE ACADEMY, RESEARCH AND PUBLISHING

CAROLINE BRANDT

The Academy

At the heart of contemporary connotations of the word 'university' lie two key concepts: that of 'whole' or 'entire' (from Latin *universus*); and that of 'community', as the term is derived from a shortened form of the Latin *universitas magistrorum et scholarium,* which may be translated as a 'community of masters and scholars.' The phrase 'community of masters and scholars' draws attention to the internal workings of the community, but does not hint at the wider community in which the scholarly community is situated and which it serves to interrogate, and to which it must ultimately answer. Nor is the phrase suggestive of any relationship with other scholarly communities. Both of these facets are of particular importance for today's academy, which benefits greatly from recent advances in communication and transportation technologies, in particular. Any appreciation of a university as a community of masters and scholars should therefore be extended beyond the *intra-community* relationships encapsulated by the phrase in question, to include its *inter-* and *extra-community* relationships; that is, awareness of its role as one among many comparable institutions, along with its membership of a larger entity that is itself a community.

This perspective can help to shed light on the purposes and functions of universities. From an intra-community perspective, these include the establishment of a facility and development of a collegial atmosphere in which scholars (faculty and students alike) can freely engage in intellectual work, often collaboratively, to extend, firstly, the boundaries of their own knowledge and that of their students, and in due course the frontiers of all knowledge, in all cases grounding their work in a cultural and scholarly heritage. There is clearly significant common ground here with inter-

community functions as faculty may collaborate with and draw on the work of their contemporaries in other institutions, and students are generally mobile, free to make an undergraduate education completed at one university the basis for further studies at another. Emphasizing the extra-community dimension, universities exist in order to provide society with information which can be used to solve the various problems they face, whether these are local, regional or global. Given such altruistic aims, there is overlap with the other two dimensions if it is accepted that in educating students, significant aims include not only producing balanced, responsible and humane individuals who are capable of making a constructive contribution to society, but also ensuring that a contribution is made to the scholarly capital, enabling scholars of the future to draw on it. Thus the three dimensions not only overlap but support one another through often reciprocal processes.

Given that universities exist within wider communities, they are greatly affected by political, economic and social factors. Recent developments in 'Anglo' societies, for example, have placed universities under a variety of pressures. Financial pressures, along with a desire to extend spheres of influence from local to global and to continue to attract international students, have led over the last 20 years or so to several 'Anglo' universities opening a multitude of branch campuses in countries such as China and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Estimates suggest that there are in the region of 105 international branch campuses of 'Anglo' (in this case, from the US, Australia and the UK) universities (Morgan, 2011). Notable examples of this process include the UK's University of Nottingham, which has branch campuses in the People's Republic of China and Malaysia (Morgan, 2011), and Australia's University of Wollongong, which established a branch campus in Dubai, UAE, in 1993 (The University of Wollongong in Dubai, 2011). International branch campuses are unique to the extent that they have one foot in the parent country and another in the host, a situation which brings significant obligations and responsibilities for both parties, raising ideological, political, ethical, educational and linguistic issues that are reflected in decisions that must be made with regard to principles and standards that include governance, independence, standards, accreditation, language of instruction and admission policy.

The Academy in the United Arab Emirates

In countries such as Malaysia and the UAE, international branch campuses exist alongside – and compete for students with – national or

federal universities as well as private institutions. The UAE presents a unique situation in this regard. Recent research undertaken by the British Council (Devine, 2009) showed that in the UAE in 2009 there were 96 Higher Education Institutions, serving a population of 5,148,664 (Middle East: United Arab Emirates, 2005), a figure which is likely to have increased slightly in the interim. Of this population, 91,154 are students, with 40% attending one of the three federal institutions, 32% enrolled in one of the 49 private international institutions and 28% attending one of 44 private local institutions. Some of these institutions are located strategically in 'education cities' and 'knowledge villages', in part reflecting understandings of the three dimensions of community explored above, as such planning should facilitate collaboration and knowledge exchange.

In such rapidly developing and competitive conditions however universities may struggle to address the various issues referred to above, and, in particular, they may experience fierce competition to attract and retain candidates with the necessary English language skills. Ahmed (2010, p.4) notes that the desire for "modernization and growth have mandated the use of the global language English and [countries such as the UAE] have therefore required English to become the medium of instruction in many, if not the majority, of their academic institutions". English is consequently the medium of instruction in the vast majority of courses offered by the UAE's 96 Higher Education Institutions, supported by imported Anglo curricula and native English speaking faculty and staff.

This situation inevitably has a range of cultural and political implications, and these have generated much recent debate (see Ahmed, 2010, for an overview of the issues). Concerns focus in particular on whether the use of English in countries where it is not the native language is likely to complement or suffocate the local language and culture. This is an issue of particular concern in countries in the Arabian Gulf, where Arabic is not only the first language of indigenous populations but also the language of the Qur'an. The situation can lead to a dilemma for Arabic-speaking academics in the UAE, many of whom feel compelled to communicate in English in order to establish and strengthen intra-community and extra-community ties, but many experience this as occurring at the expense of Arabic and its cultures, diminishing the opportunity to define and strengthen the cultural and scholarly heritage of Arabs in general and Emiratis in particular. The situation is further complicated by the fact that most scholars teach and study alongside not only Emiratis but those of very many different nationalities and language backgrounds, reflecting the demography of the UAE, where recent estimates (Expat numbers rise rapidly, 2009) indicate that the population

may be broken down into approximately 20% Emirati and 80% expatriate. The largest groups of expatriates are Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, followed by communities of other Asians from countries that include China, the Philippines, Thailand, Korea, Afghanistan and Iran. Those from Europe, Australia, Northern Africa, Africa and Latin America make up approximately 500,000 of the overall population. Thus, English functions as a significant lingua franca in the UAE.

Most scholars in the UAE, faculty and students alike, therefore negotiate daily the challenges and opportunities created by the dilemmas, ambiguities and complexities inherent in this cultural and linguistic cauldron. The most visible outcomes of this negotiation are the formal presentation and scholarly writing that results from research carried out at postgraduate levels and beyond.

Research and the Community

> Knowledge does not hang in space; it is a product of social processes. (Bouma & Ling, 2004, p. 3)

All research entails the systematic investigation of sources, materials and processes in the search for new knowledge about our lives and contexts. It is built on scientific evidence rather than on beliefs, opinions or authority. Its primary purpose may simply be the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, in which case there may be no immediately obvious benefit or commercial opportunity. Research conducted for these reasons constitutes pure research, also known as basic or fundamental research, and its purpose is to establish the knowledge that is likely to be required in further research, which aims to solve practical, daily problems, such as treatment for a medical condition, and in so doing improve the human condition. Such research is applied research, as it takes existing knowledge and applies it to current problems.

In the positivist tradition, knowledge exists outside of us, waiting to be discovered, and so it is considered possible to formulate hypotheses and establish irrefutable laws from which generalizations can be made. Making progress within such a paradigm entails the application of reason and logic in the search for ultimate truths. Advocates of this empiricist approach therefore believe that there is one, right, way of conducting research, and that there is one, right (that is, objective and value-free) answer to each question. This kind of research is highly prized in Western societies:

> The positive sciences (physics, chemistry, economics and psychology, for example) are often seen as the crowning achievements of Western

civilization, and in their practice it is assumed that "truth" can transcend opinion and personal bias (Carey, 1989, p. 99). (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 7)

Critics of the positivist project (for example, Kuhn, 1962; Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Gould, 1981; Stake, 1995; Guba & Lincoln, 1998), however, point out that all science takes place within a context and as such is a form of social practice, being carried out by individuals operating within that context and holding complex value and belief systems. It is impossible to disassociate scientific practice either from its context or from the belief systems of those who carry it out, as:

> Science is based on "taken for granted" assumptions and thus, like any other social practice must be understood within a specific context. Traced to their source all activities which pose as science can be traced to fundamental assumptions relating to everyday life and can in no way be regarded as generating knowledge with an objective value-free status, as is sometimes claimed. What passes for scientific knowledge can be shown to be founded upon a set of unstated conventions, beliefs and assumptions, just as every-day, common sense knowledge is. The difference between them lies largely in the nature of rules and the community which recognizes and subscribes to them. The knowledge in both cases is not so much 'objective' as shared. (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p. 255)

The results of scientific enquiry are therefore not value-free or objective, as they are carried out within, and by, a participant in a complex social and cultural context consisting of beliefs, values, traditions, principles, rules, customs and so forth, which influence both the process of scientific thought and argument, and the interpretation of outcomes. If this is the case, then it becomes more difficult to accept that knowledge is "out there", waiting to be discovered.

This is particularly true in the social sciences where the aim of enquiry is often an understanding of the meaning or significance of social phenomena. Social context can be disentangled neither from the research process nor from the interpretation of the results. In these circumstances it is inappropriate to attempt to establish the existence of an objective social reality. Instead, the research is the medium via which "reality" may be created and interpreted, and without which such reality cannot so readily be said to exist. A good understanding, therefore, of the context within which social research takes place is essential to inform both the research processes and the outcomes.

Research as an Instrument

Besides aspects such as country, culture and language, a key element of the context in which research takes place is the researcher him or herself, and his or her assumptions and values. The researcher operating beyond the traditions of the positivist project is not just an instrument – he or she may be said to be *the* instrument:

> The problem of representation [….] is often phrased in terms of a false dichotomy, that is, "the extent to which the personal self should have a place in the scientific scholarly text" (Bruner, 1993, p. 2). This false division between the personal and the ethnographic self rests on the assumption that it is possible to write a text that does not bear the trace of its author. Of course, this is not possible. All texts are personal statements. (Lincoln & Denzin, in Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p. 413)

Within this paradigm self-knowledge is considered essential as the self is part of the context upon which the enquiry is contingent. This being so, this volume contains autobiographical elements, such as those to be found on p. 57 and p. 172 the purpose of which is to illuminate and illustrate some of the values, beliefs, assumptions, prejudices, and biases which influenced this work.

Applied Research

The eight emerging researchers whose work is presented in this unique volume have in all cases conducted research that goes beyond establishing knowledge to its application with the specific intention of directly – and, in some cases, immediately – improving the practice being investigated. The researchers describe local realities and express emerging constructs, on classroom management and school leadership themes that vary from how teachers encourage greater student participation to what leadership style would best suit a secondary school and serve it teachers and students. Al-Shammari, for example, reports her findings to the instructor whose classes she observed, and, though she is unable to be certain of the cause, she nevertheless sees an immediate improvement in class participation rates among students. Applied research which aims to improve practice in this manner is action research, a term first coined by Lewin (1948) which is "simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out." (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 162).

Self-reflective enquiry may be usefully viewed as a cycle, which begins by gathering information in order to establish and describe the problem and its context, followed by reflection on and analysis of the situation, action to resolve the problems identified, and evaluation of the actions taken and their results, a stage that may be followed by the identification of other problems requiring further research. An important part of the cycle is for the researcher to engage in ongoing reflection: on his or her practice, on the research process and on its outcomes, and, on the basis of what he or she observes, to be willing to engage in possible modification of action. It is this self-conscious reflexivity that distinguishes action research from other forms of applied research.

Modification of action, even when it leads to significant improvement in practice, will however be lost over time unless the researcher who has troubled to "trace[d] the curve of social discourse; [also] fix[es] it into respectable form" (Geertz, cited in Schwandt, 1998, p. 230). There is essentially only one way for this to take place. Researchers must "fix" their outcomes by expressing them in writing; to ensure that this is in a "respectable form", their writing must comply with academic standards and be published in a place that will enable maximum relevant exposure. This dissemination stage is critical as not only does it make the work available to other researchers in the community, but it also allows them to provide feedback, ask questions and draw on the outcomes to carry out related research, thereby establishing further knowledge, which is in turn disseminated through publication. Researchers, functioning in their three dimensions of community, are beholden by those on whose behalf they work to make their work available for scrutiny through publication.

Writing as a Socially-Mediated Discourse

The three dimensions of community are clearly inter-related and inter-dependent. It is communication, in particular in its written form, that acts as both bond and broker, binding the *inter-, intra-* and *extra-community* dimensions together while allowing for meanings to be negotiated and interrogated through its discourse. Though writing is usually largely a solitary activity, its purposes and uses are social as the permanence of writing creates opportunities for dialogue with the reader. For his or her part, the writer offers the reader re-presentation and interpretation of material that is otherwise unavailable; meta-textual devices that serve as navigation aids and guide the reader, facilitating reader choice and empowering him or her; reference to the body of existing knowledge, lending definition to the interpretation; and mediation between what is

known, what is coming to be known and what will be known within a community of discourse. Writing may be seen therefore as an enduring 'snapshot' of a particular set of conditions taken at a particular time and in a particular context.

The availability of this mediation is particularly critical in societies which are necessarily preoccupied with establishing their own knowledge base and research culture, of which the UAE is a good example. A recent article (Jump, 2011) in the UK-based magazine *Times Higher Education* reported a particular need in the Arabian Gulf to improve the quantity of research output, which, according to Mick Randall, former dean of education at the postgraduate-only British University in Dubai, "rests on the lack of a research culture: a fundamental failure to realize the value of research in social development". The report emphasizes the need to improve quantity as well as quality, which Dr Randall describes as "woefully low, given [the region's] economic prosperity". Such conditions make publications of the eight snapshots contained in this volume all the more valuable, as in this form they should not only report outcomes that improved current practice, as the researchers set out to do, but also contribute to the knowledge base and research culture of the region.

The *Times Higher Education* article, however, referring to the *Global Research Report Middle East* produced by Thomson Reuters, also draws attention to the need to develop researchers. While applauding the region's efforts to improve quality through establishing new universities and various 'education cities', the report notes that these will not have an immediate impact as training a new generation of researchers and drawing the quality of the new research to the attention of the rest of the world takes time (Jump, 2011). An important part of this training is to encourage novice researchers to complete the research cycle by engaging with their scholarly communities through publication, giving these researchers a voice that enables them to see their work as contributing to the generation of new knowledge, moving beyond the confines of student-teacher transaction to interaction with the scholarly community. This interaction, in the cases presented here, is warranted not only by the fact that the students have engaged in research, but also by the relevance of the topics to the researchers' communities and the quality of writing produced.

Developing Voices

Research is an activity, and an active voice conveys that notion. (Dane, 1990, p. 214)

For many students, Master's study is the first opportunity that they have had to engage in a full-scale research project. The requirement to make an original contribution to knowledge distinguishes postgraduate from undergraduate study, and the more advanced the study, the greater the significance of research as a course component. Given that, in order to complete the research cycle, the researcher is obliged to publish significant results, and given also that these emerging researchers are operating in a society that lacks published research and trained researchers, the expectation that this group should publish is clearly a case of *sine qua non*.

All writers at the outset must make decisions with regard to how they view and position themselves in their writing. In the case of the researchers writing in this volume, in accord with the ideology of action research, they have opted to refer to themselves in the first person. This decision gives appropriate emphasis to the interpersonal, interactive and subjective aspect of their work. It could not, however, have been an easy decision to make or carry though, in the face of the wealth of scholarly writing in which subjectivity is suppressed, in accord with a positivist stance, through the use of a range of linguistic devices. Nevertheless, these researchers have successfully adopted a subjective stance to construct their stories, conveying a sense of their agency in the process, along with the richness and uniqueness of their data and its interpretation. In so doing they have embarked on a path to establish their voices as scholars. Voice may be "broadly defined as the means by which authors express their identity as scholars" (Nunn, 2008, p. 32), and it is particularly important for emerging scholars in emerging research cultures to establish their voices as scholars in order to participate in inter-, intra- and extra-community arenas and benefit from scrutiny through peer review process and post-publication feedback. Publication earns scholars respect, reputation and legitimacy.

The inclusion of biodata in publications such as this one also contributes to this expression of identity. Referring to his work as chief editor of the Asian EFL Journal, Nunn (2008, p. 36) reports that while authors often write their biodata in the first person, the journals' editors rewrite this into the third person. He observes that "[t]his practice [….] does not stand up to scrutiny. Authors write their own biodata, but it is presented as if someone else wrote it." The editorial decision to present biodata in the first person scaffolds the researchers' efforts to establish their scholarly identities as active, applied researchers.

Writing to Learn

> Be a good craftsman: avoid any rigid set of procedures. Above all, seek to
> develop and to use the sociological imagination. Avoid the fetishism of
> method and technique. Urge the rehabilitation of the unpretentious
> intellectual craftsman, and try to become such a craftsman yourself. Let
> every man be his own methodologist; let every man be his own theorist; let
> theory and method again become part of the practice of a craft. (Mills,
> 1959, p. 224)

Scholarly writing is a creative intellectual process that draws on both
art and craft. It involves, at least, cogitating, reflecting and revising,
analyzing, comparing, categorizing, selecting, rejecting, synthesizing,
composing, connecting, summarizing, integrating quotes and paraphrases,
and development of ideas. It has two primary outcomes, one of which is
the very visible written product; the other is the (usually) far less obvious
personal intellectual development that takes place as a result of the entire
process. Postgraduate students are therefore presented with a fertile
opportunity for professional development, through applied research, its
related writing and its publication. It could be said that for all postgraduate
students, publication is the capstone in a "constructively-integrated"
curriculum, that is, one in which all components serve the same goals and
support each other (Biggs, 1999). Until publication has taken place, the
process is incomplete.

Voices of the Future

The development of information technology has given rise to an information
revolution, and consequently new approaches to storing, evaluating,
distributing and accessing writing are emerging. It is likely that today's
emerging researchers will soon be presented with publication options that
were not previously available, of which open access is one such example.
Other powerful research and publication processes are also greatly
facilitated by information technology, including collaboration, translation
and data management. Such options will expand and change the shape of
the playing field, and may create the space required for novice
international researchers to experiment with ideas and their presentation.
In this way, these emerging researchers have the potential to lead their
countries and regions towards the development of a distinctive research
culture, one that does not seek to replicate Anglo research cultures, as
seems to be the current trend, but which has its own unique agenda,
principles, characteristics, language and voice, all of which are reflective

of the broader culture in which it is embedded. There seems to be little good reason, for example, why publications originating in a country such as the UAE and written by bilingual researchers should not appear in parallel English – Arabic format.

The eight researchers whose work is presented here make a significant contribution to this project on behalf of their academy, the American University of Sharjah; their host country, the UAE; their countries of origin, and the international scholarly community. They are to be commended and it is hoped that their work will be enjoyed and appreciated. In accord with the ideology presented here, readers are encouraged to correspond with the authors and provide them with feedback. To this end, the researchers' email addresses are included with their biodata.

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CHAPTER TWO

ACTION RESEARCH: IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, IN LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT; AS LEARNING AND AS VOICE

DAVID PRESCOTT

Action Research

Action research is a reflective approach to investigation, generally driven by a desire for positive improvement or change. This can be a method for individual investigation, by a classroom teacher or by a health professional for instance. But it can also be a method for investigation by two or three professional colleagues, or by a community of practice to improve the way they address issues and solve problems. Action research may be undertaken by participants in the situation under review or it may be conducted by outsiders, professional researchers or consultants with the aim of improving strategies, practices, and knowledge of professional environments.

Since Kurt Lewin (1946) first wrote about action research it has attracted a growing interest from practitioners and researchers in the 'human' sciences. Change has been the legacy of this growth in interest; prominent writers who embody this change include Grundy (1986, 1987), Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), Nunan (1992), Zuber-Skerritt (1996) and also Kennedy (2005). Among the best known writers in the action research field are Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) and in their view action research exhibits three characteristics which define its special features. These are that action research is carried out by practitioners, it is collaborative and it is aimed at bringing about change. Greenwood (1994, p. 87) states that action research has two goals, "to effect change or intervene in the world

and to generate and test action theories. The first goal relates to the 'action' in action research, the second, to the 'research'."

Kemmis and McTaggart see action research as a group activity and believe that those who will be affected by change are primarily responsible for decisions about the action(s) that might most productively alter the issues being investigated and for evaluating the results of strategies tried out in practice. In their view, increase in understanding resulting from individual investigation and evaluation would not constitute action research. In summary, the essence of action research for Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) is intention to bring about change through collaborative investigation.

Cohen and Manion (1985) emphasize similar attributes. They stress the situational nature of action research and its concern with identifying and solving problems in particular contexts. Furthermore Cohen and Manion stress collaboration as well as the desire to improve as essential characteristics of action research. More recently writers such as Burbank and Kauchack (2003) and McNiff and Whitehead (2002) have similarly stressed the community aspect of action research claiming that it has more effect on practice when it is collaborative.

In the English language teaching domain Nunan (1992) has written extensively about action research. He has argued that collaboration is highly desirable in action research but believes that it should not be one of the key determining attributes. Many teachers, he says, who are interested in exploring processes of teaching and learning in their own context are either unable, for practical reasons, or unwilling, for personal reasons, to undertake collaborative research (1992, p. 18). Further, he disputes the claim that action research must be concerned with change. He considers that a teacher may initiate a descriptive case study of a group of learners, or of a particular class, or even of a single learner. For such an investigation to be considered action research it should be guided by a question and supported by data and interpretation, but not necessarily or primarily concerned with change in the teacher's situation. The Nunan position is a view that informs the studies reported later in this volume. In the context of classroom and educational institution inquiry, the descriptive case study, initiated to make processes and circumstances more explicit, has an important role. This role is associated in these studies with the development of a reflective approach to leadership, management and teaching, which descriptive case studies certainly encourage.

Burns and Hood have stressed the emphasis that action research "places … on 'insider' accounts rather than on observations … by external researchers" (1997, p. 3). According to Burns and Hood the context-based

nature of action research, oriented towards processes aimed at heightening understanding, helps to generate new insights about teaching and learning. In the project they report on, *Teaching disparate learner groups,* action research was used to illuminate "problems and issues … teachers were dealing with on a daily basis. It sought to involve the perspectives of teachers and learners themselves …" (Burns and Hood, 1997, op. cit.). This type of research is sometimes referred to as participatory action research in order to make clear the role of the researcher as instrument in the investigation. The inquiry, with its collective and self-reflective features, is an attempt to understand and improve practices and situations where the researcher may also be participant. Participatory action research should empower and lead to improvement (Baum et. al., 2006). Several studies reported in this volume can be appropriately designated participatory.

Action Research in the United Arab Emirates

Reflective practices with respect to pedagogic and learning issues are becoming more important in teacher education in the Middle East, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) being a case in point. The Emirates are reforming their education systems as education ministries seek to move classroom practice from predominantly teacher-directed, exam-driven systems to practice which is more student-responsive with a variety of methodologies and with modern technology integrated into the systems. In particular the Madares Al Ghad (MAG) Program in the United Arab Emirates, launched in 2007, seeks to create a "curriculum that is competitive internationally" and "develop a school environment that is student centered" (Truscott, 2010). However, these moves are recent and as Stephenson and Harold point out "relatively little information exists on collaborative research between educational researchers and teachers using such approaches" (2007, p. 1). The United Arab Emirates is representative of a number of countries in the region where, because of the relatively recent development of collaborative research it is not possible to assume that the skills needed to instigate such practices have been attained by teachers, particularly if their training is not contemporary.

Initiatives by the Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT) in the UAE have certainly helped to address this situation by nurturing a research culture and encouraging young professionals to systematically evaluate practices in the workplace of teaching, the classroom. HCT students in the final year of the Bachelor of Education program complete a project "broadly based on the principles of action research" (Mission, 2006, p. 5).

These projects display the customary characteristics of action research; problem identification, investigation of possible solutions, planning for improvement, implementation and critical assessment. The important points are that the work is "a way through to continuous improvement" (Mission, 2006, op. cit.) and the publication of the Bachelor of Education students' reflective action papers are important contributions to encouraging growth of an educational research community.

Stephenson and Harold's own work with UAE government sector, private sector and graduate educational contexts are further evidence of "increased interest in recent years in the concept of the school as a learning community" and that "the notion appears to offer new perspectives on how teacher professional learning might become more effective" (2007, p. 2). This notion builds on the idea of a "community of practice" (Wenger, 1998) and it provides a useful perspective on knowledge and learning. Stephenson and Harold's use of an action research model has promoted increased the knowledge skills and confidence of supervisors, teachers and graduate students building capacity as teachers of children or as leaders of educational change.

The action research projects reported in the subsequent chapters in this book are a further contribution to the development of a research culture in education in the UAE. They take the descriptive case study approach described by Nunan (1992) and display a subjectivity generally associated with a positivist stance. The critical process of reflection, so important in action research is revealed in two ways. First, the projects each contain a section where the researcher/writer considers what was learnt during the action research, what connections could be traced from conception through to outcome and, significantly, what new insights emerged. This reflection is well captured in this observation:

> When I reflected on my intervention plan, I was able to understand how leadership style can help change or impede the school culture and climate. This action research was an eye-opener for me as a researcher and a participant. (Faiza Tabib, 2011, p. 57)

Second, the authors reflected on their experiences of action research one year after completion of the investigations. From the perspective of time elapsed what participants say in retrospect is often different from what they say, both during and at the conclusion of an investigation or a course. Taylor (1996) points out that while retrospective reflection is rare its value is that it allows participants to appraise the usefulness and effectiveness of an investigation in the context in which they work or study, at some later time. The observation below shows how the writer

came to understand the various roles that he is able to pursue in his professional life.

> It has also shed light to the multiple roles that I should play as a teacher. For instance, it has revealed the necessity of being a teacher and a counselor to the students, and a colleague and a leader with my fellow teachers, at the same time. (Rajesh Joseph, 2011, p. 179)

Action Research, Leadership and Management

At the heart of this book are the participatory action research projects completed by Master of Arts candidates studying *English Language Teaching (ELT) Leadership and Management* in the MA TESOL program at The American University of Sharjah. The *ELT Leadership and Management* course was offered for the first time at the American University of Sharjah in the Spring semester, 2010. The text chosen to support the course was *Leadership in English Language Teaching & Learning,* authored by Coombe et al (2008). Two important values of this text are first its application and relevance to the Middle East ELT situation and second its currency. In addition, the chapters are structured so as to facilitate foundational reading which supports extension work and stimulates engagement and exploration. The book also covers key aspects of ELT leadership and management and therefore offers substantial, relevant support to a course syllabus.

A constructivist epistemology underpins the *ELT Leadership and Management* course syllabus and it was used to foster course participants' development of understanding and knowledge. Participants considered all course content within the frameworks of pertinent theories of learning; constructivism and socially mediated learning methods derived from the work of Vygotsky (1978). Using Widdowson's (1994) argument that in order to develop professionals (teachers) need "the disciplinary authority of theory (and) to know how to use it as a condition for enquiry" the course charts movement from theory through practice to reflection. The course is grounded in the belief that knowledge and application of authority (of theory) is essential to make one's way meaningfully and constructively with respect to leadership and management. Further, the course uses exemplars, shaping methodology and the exploration of and learning about management theories through positive leadership and management principles.

The inclusive, reflective qualities of action research involved these students in problem solving and reflecting on learning. The cyclical nature of action research presents the opportunity for on-going professional

learning experiences over time, beyond the duration of the course of study. Dick has described this aspect of action research, "The research consists of learning and understanding, often leading to publication of results and to further investigation, often referred to as cyclical or "spiral in structure" (Dick, 2000). Prescott and Head note this potential in professional development work conducted with teachers, "it enabled the teachers to generate ideas for future investigation.…one participant commented six months later that he had been able to conduct a more extensive AR project on scoring student writing for post graduate study" (2005, p. 22). In this volume the time elapsed reflections of the researchers in the final chapter illustrate this particular capacity of action research; to foster on-going personal, professional growth.

Participatory action research was used in the course ELT Leadership and Management as a knowledge–building process so the course participants could utilize the leadership and management principles they had studied and apply them in their own contexts. The action research assignment was conceived on constructivist learning principles in that it sought to build interaction between the researchers' experiences in the contexts of their investigations and the ideas generated by their study. Further it was designed to build their knowledge through the use of social mediation contexts "mediation … through active participation whereby learners transform their under-standing and skill in solving the problem" (Salomon & Perkins, 1998, p. 7). The cyclical action research process created opportunities for the researchers to develop critical perspectives of the problems they identified and sought to solve. Further, the cyclical action research process gave room for principles and ideas generated during the coursework in ELT Leadership and Management to be marshaled to address these problems. Burns and Hood describe this process:

Action researchers recognize that the knowledge that is generated about practice is context-based. It derives from personal and social experiences created in the course of introducing innovations and it uses these experiences to interpret and construct new insights about teaching and learning (1997, p. 3).

Action Research as a Learning Process

Damon (1991) has noted the relationship between individual and socially mediated learning; "Even when learning is fostered through processes of social communication, individual activity and reflection still play a critical role" (p. 392). In the studies included in this volume this duality can be clearly seen. The researchers each worked in contexts

distinguished by cultural features, social interaction, participant relationships. In this regard they owed a great deal to their colleagues who, while not directly responsible for the research initiatives, nevertheless had significant input as contributors and eventually, in some cases, agents for change.

Some of these contexts were shaped by the intimate involvement of the researcher and the innovation that drove the action research. For instance, Azza Gamal El Din in her study concerning implementing group work effectively in the classroom noted the "cooperation of the school's principal as well as that of my fellow teachers" and how "group work encourages broader skills of cooperation and negotiation" (p. 35). Khaled Mohamed Ahmed's implementation and monitoring of an Out-Of-School Reading Program opened up an area of cultural practice. As researcher and participant Khaled reflected on this unexpected outcome:

> However, what we can highlight here is the reaction of students when their parents showed more interest and support. Some students were proud to have their fathers read with them for the first time. Some of them asked me to take two stories every day because their fathers helped them read. I was not sure whether they did that because they wanted to read, or because they wanted their fathers to read for them, or both. Clearly we need to connect more with parents to build a better partnership between home and school. (p. 80)

Faiza Tabib's investigation of the use of modeling to change meeting culture in a secondary school threaded a delicate pathway through entrenched beliefs and behaviors in order to instigate change. This pathway is indicated in the observation "it was not easy for me to convince the principal to change or even reflect on her leadership style as she tends to adopt the autocratic style of leadership" (p. 57). But as an agent of change and with the support of the action research spiral structure Faiza was able to approach the problem in her investigation in various ways and through adaptability and persistence effect the changes she believed were needed, "I realized, while working on my study the flexible nature of the action research. As a researcher I was able to change the focus and even to go back and forth in order to add some missing information" (p. 58). Eventually this change embraces school culture, participant relationships and to some extent social interaction "this study helped me to realize and believe that the distributed leadership style best fits in my school context; everyone should share part of the responsibility to value meetings and to take part in decision-making" (p. 57).

The capacity of action research to empower a teacher to improve and understand institutional culture is clearly seen in studies of Rajesh Joseph

and Yana Dodu. Rajesh sought an intervention to change the lack of preparedness and engagement of students and his investigation showed that habits can be changed if "dedicated and sincere steps are taken by teachers" (p. 93). Reflecting on the change process he notes:

> This action research has helped me to make commendable changes in myself as a teacher, and in my attitudes towards student misbehavior, and towards my institute. (p. 101)

Yana Dodu was concerned to come to a better understanding of her class and of the reasons for the problematic behaviors exhibited which challenged her classroom management. At the end of her investigation she had not resolved the problem but she had come to understand it as this observation shows:

> There are plenty of sub-contexts that underpin effective teaching, classroom management, and interaction with students. If this kind of enquiry were not conducted in the context of action research it would take ages to investigate each of the problematic issues separately. An advantage of action research was that it allowed constant circulation of the process, where the important components were observations, journal entry and reflections. (p. 172)

Ivor Goodson, writing about the personality of change in schools has observed "The neglect of the personal needs to be rapidly remedied, not least in the field of change theory. It is to be hoped that the re-embrace of the personal will humanize and galvanize the patterns of social change that we undertake in the future" (2001, p. 3). In the studies referred to in the preceding section the researchers find personal agentry through their engagement with the action research investigations they pursue. This fosters, what Goodson calls, "their hearts and minds" and "their passions and purposes" (op cit, p. 5), promoting positive and wholesome patterns of professional behavior. Lave and Wenger's (1991) work on situated learning is apposite to action research. Lave's argument that learning is situated meaning that it is embedded within activity, context and culture relates closely to action research. Where there is departure is in the concept that situated learning is "unintentional rather than deliberate." The action research projects reported in this volume exhibit planned rather than involuntary endeavor. In situated leaning knowledge should be encountered in authentic contexts; the settings and situations that generally embody that knowledge. Social interaction and collaboration are essential components of situated learning — learners become involved in a