COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION RESEARCH: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS' AND ACADEMIC RESEARCHERS' TEAMWORK IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL

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Abstract

The article examines the processes and challenges involved in conducting participatory research and evaluation in schools, by looking at a case study of a collaborative evaluation research that was conducted in a secondary school in Israel by two researchers and three teachers. It describes the experiences of the research team while conducting the study, the processes that developed during this collaboration, and the kinds of knowledge that emerged over the two years of teamwork. It also describes the features of the relationships between the various individuals who participated in the study. Implications for evaluation in schools are presented.

In this article, we seek to examine the processes and challenges involved in conducting participatory research and evaluation in schools. We present a case study of a collaborative research that was conducted in a secondary school in Israel by two researchers from a college of education and three teachers from the school. The experiences of the research team while conducting the study, the processes that developed within the joint teamwork and the kinds of knowledge that emerged over the two years of team meetings will be described. We will present our case study with reference to the literature...
on participatory research as a form of action research (e.g., Boog, 2003; Cassell & Johnson, 2006; Reason & Bradbury, 2001) and relate it more specifically to participatory evaluation of social and educational programs as a model that supports organizational decision-making and utilization-focused evaluation as well as democratic values (Brisolara, 1998; Cousins & Earl, 1995, Cousins & Whitmore, 1998). The research conducted at the school was participatory, collaborative action research that involved the evaluation of instructional processes. We have therefore named it "collaborative evaluation research", a term that in our view best captures its principal characteristic. As will be described in the following section, action research, participatory research and participative evaluation are considered to be various forms of collaborative research, and they share characteristics, purposes and perspectives that we took into consideration while analyzing and interpreting the processes and phenomena we examined. Since the case study has implications for teachers' research as a staff development activity and also for research conducted by teacher educators, we present these topics as part of the theoretical framework as well.

Theoretical Framework

Action research has developed in the field of education as a form of inquiry that practitioners conduct with regard to their practice or aspects of their practice in order to improve it. Approaches such as the teacher as researcher, practitioner research and self-study, which are often applied to action research, have come to occupy an important place in educational theory and practice in recent decades (e.g., McNiff & Whitehead, 2002; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). Action research deals with a field of activity of some kind and is directed at practice. The objects of the research may be people, actions or programs, and its main aim is to improve and advance professional practice. The process requires the systematic collection of data pertaining to the action for the purpose of decision-making and change. The aim of action research, as it developed in the 1960s and 1970s, was to enable teachers in schools to participate in a holistic process of planning, developing, implementing and evaluating curricula in the framework of what is called school-based curriculum development (e.g., Elliot, 1991, 1997; Stenhouse, 1975). Data collection, analysis and interpretation are inseparable and crucial parts of action research. They aim at examining whether the action achieves the desired educational ideal and objectives, what the difficulties in the practical realization of the ideal are, and in what way teaching can be improved so that it corresponds to what is desired (Carr & Kemmis, 1988; Elliot 1991, 1997; Grundy, 1987; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001).

A central principle in action research is participation. Action research is often considered to be based on a collaborative, participatory worldview (Boog, 2003). According to Cassell and Johnson (2006), participation is a multifaceted term that covers an array of different practices inspired by competing philosophical assumptions. Some forms of what has been dubbed participatory action research (PAR) may imply that the people in an organization or a community participate actively throughout the research process, from the initial design or problem diagnosis to the adoption of action strategies (Harrison & Leitch, 2000; Whyte, 1991), while the researcher's role moves away from one of expert to that of enabler (Cassell & Johnson, 2006). Other models of participatory research emphasize empowerment and emancipation as central tenets of the research
endeavor, and aim at fostering, through the research, values of equality and social justice (Boog, 2003; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Reason & Brandbury, 2001). According to such models, practitioners should be considered equal partners who have a say, possess knowledge, and have to be granted independent status when conducting research together with academic researchers.

In the field of evaluation, the concept of participatory evaluation (PE) has been used to describe collaborative inquiry (Brisolara, 1998; Cousins & Earl, 1995; Cousins & Whitmore, 1998). According to Cousins and Whitmore,

Participatory evaluation implies that, when doing an evaluation, researchers, facilitators, or professional evaluators collaborate in some way with individuals, groups, or communities who have a decided stake in the program, development project, or other entity being evaluated (1998, p. 5).

The authors describe two streams of participatory evaluation. One stream, practical participatory evaluation (P-PE), supports program or organizational decision-making and problem-solving. The other, transformative participatory evaluation (T-PE), is oriented toward emancipation and social justice and seeks to empower members of community groups who are less powerful. Cousins and Whitmore (1998) describe the similarities of participatory evaluation to other forms of collaborative inquiry, such as the ones we presented above. One of these forms, the North American adaptation of participatory action research (PAR), bears some resemblance to P-PE. Another form of collaborative inquiry, emancipatory action research, is more closely related to T-PE, according to Cousins and Whitmore. The authors pose several questions for consideration in relation to participatory evaluation, among them questions about power, ethics, participant selection, and conditions that facilitate participatory evaluation. They suggest that credible answers to these questions will come from sustained participatory evaluation practice and "particularly from practice that includes deliberate mechanisms for ongoing observation and reflection" (p. 19). They express the hope that the participatory evaluators and the participants with whom they work will report on their experiences, thus informing professional understanding of these issues.

Action research, participatory research and participatory evaluation share various features as described above. In the field of education, they are also linked to what is called school-based evaluation, since many of these forms of inquiry take place in schools and are conducted by educational researchers and school practitioners. Action research is one of the models that meet the need for internal school evaluation. Nevo (1995, 2002) supports the perception of school evaluation as a combination of internal evaluation, which is performed by a school team that consists of staff members such as teachers, position-holders and principals, and external evaluation, which is performed by evaluators, researchers and other professionals who work in an institution, a company or any other framework that is external to the school. It has recently been proposed that schools empower their staff members in the field of evaluation and that in the case of educational programs, initiatives and innovations, the focus of educational judgment should shift from the external evaluators to the practitioners (McNamara & O'hara, 2004). Nevo (1995, 2002) argues that internal evaluators are generally more familiar with the local context of the school than are their
external colleagues. He also claims that it is not only pupils and their performance that should be the objects of evaluation, but also educational programs; that school evaluation should serve both the formative and the summative functions of evaluation (Stake, 2000), and that the needs of internal evaluation should be met as fully as possible by the teaching staff for whom evaluation is a part of their job definition.

It has been recommended that action research as research conducted by practitioners about their work should be a model for teacher professional development – an alternative one to the traditional models of professional development by means of formal academic courses and workshops (e.g., Kervin, 2003; Zeichner, 2003; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). It is also perceived to be a powerful methodology that can promote professional development in organizations and contribute to organizational improvement (McNiff & Whitehead, 2000). Studies on the impact of action research conducted by educational practitioners depict its contribution to enhancing teachers' confidence in their ability to promote student learning, to coping with problem situations in schools and classrooms, to developing inquiry skills that the teachers may use in their teaching, and to renewing their pride and excitement with regard to their teaching (e.g., Richert, 1996; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001; Zeichner, 2003). The common structure for action research as a staff development activity has been systematic meetings of groups of teachers to develop research and discuss the issues involved in the process. These group meetings, be they carried out under the auspices of educational officials and supervisors or in local colleges and universities, are usually facilitated by professional researchers who are staff members at the college or the university (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001; Zeichner, 2003). This type of facilitation is problematic, since it places the professional researcher in a position of power vis-à-vis the other participants. There are reports, however, that many higher education institutions do promote collaborative action research studies with local schools as a means of reducing the gap between the educational field and the academic world (e.g., Henderson, Hunt & Wester, 1999). The collaboration is expressed in the efforts to build participatory professional communities of teachers and academic researchers who are jointly and equally involved in developing research questions and procedures, and together evaluate and examine curricula, instructional methods and educational programs so as to improve the educational practice of all partners involved in the research (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

In recent years, in addition to the research on inquiry carried out by teachers, a great deal of attention has been shifted to teacher educators in colleges and universities – their own education, learning, knowledge development and research. Cochran-Smith summarizes many works published in this direction and suggests that

...the education of teacher educators in different contexts and at different entry points over the course of their professional career is substantially enriched when inquiry is regarded as a stance on the overall enterprise of teacher education and when teacher educators inquire collaboratively about assumptions and values, professional knowledge and practice, the contexts of schools as well as higher education, and their own as well as their students' learning (2003, p. 7).
The reason we bring up this point here is our role in the case study presented in this article as academic researchers who are also teacher educators in a college of education. In recent decades, in many colleges and universities in the US, Europe and Israel where research has not traditionally been the primary emphasis, teacher educators have been expected to conduct and publish research alongside their traditional roles of teaching courses, developing programs and working with school-based teachers (Cochran-Smith, 2003, 2005). These developments have been the background against which we initiated, developed and carried out the collaborative study with the teachers at the school which is the subject of the case study presented here.

Background of the Case Study

In this article, we relate to one component from a research study that was conducted jointly by Beit Berl College of Education and the Dror Regional Comprehensive High School, both located in the center of Israel. The research had two main objectives: (1) to develop a model of collaboration between a college and a school by means of the collaborative involvement of researchers from the college and teachers from the school in action research, and to investigate the processes and effects of this collaborative model; (2) to perform a joint examination of an educational issue that is important to the school and also has the potential to contribute to the production of general educational knowledge as well as knowledge for teacher education.

Together, we chose as our research topic two organizational procedures implemented by Dror School as a way of coping with the differential needs of the pupils and with the heterogeneity of the student population. One of the processes is called Opening Triads, and its main objective is the periodic reorganization of three classes from the same grade and subject into three new groups according to topics or levels of teaching and learning. The second process is called Enrichment Curriculum, and its main objective is to permit any pupils who may be interested to carry out a special project over and above their regular studies and homework in a particular subject and to receive a special grade for it on their report cards.

In accordance with the research aims and questions, the research was conducted in two directions. The first direction involved the collaboration between the researchers from the college and the teacher researchers as well as the processes that developed within the joint teamwork. This part of the study is the focus of the present article. The second direction focused on research planning, data collection and analyses in the Opening Triads and Enrichment Curriculum context, and concerned the heterogeneity of the pupils in the classroom and in the school. We considered the study to be action research: In relation to the collaborative direction of the research, the action was built into the collaborative process of the teamwork in planning and conducting the research, and it was dealt with according to processes that developed during the two-year research period. In the second direction of the research, with its focus on instructional strategies, the action component consisted of the processes that stemmed from the research activity of the researchers and from the research results that were presented both formally and informally at various stages to individuals or teams at the school. Thus, we have action research (the investigation of processes for coping with heterogeneity) within action research (the investigation of the
The investigation of the organizational processes, Opening Triads and Enrichment Curriculum, for coping with heterogeneity was more specifically evaluation research carried out by a collaborative team.

In the present article we discuss the findings regarding the first research aim, that is, the investigation of the collaborative process, inasmuch as it may assist in developing a model of collaboration between the field and academia and as a possibility for and an example of school evaluation. We seek to examine the possibilities inherent in this process and the lessons it teaches the field of evaluation. In order for the full context of the collaborative action research to be understood, we will first provide a brief description of the topic, contents, research questions, procedures and main findings related to the second direction of the Dror study about instructional practices.

The Dror Study and its Contents

The aim of the study was to examine Opening Triads and Enrichment Curriculum as instructional-organizational procedures that reflect the school vision of dealing with the heterogeneity of the pupils by means of a flexible organization of learning groups and by fostering excellence.

Research Questions

Are these organizational procedures being implemented, and to what extent? What are the models for Opening Triads and Enrichment Curriculum in the various subjects and teams, and are there differences between them? What are the advantages, disadvantages and difficulties in implementing Opening Triads and Enrichment Curriculum? What are the recommendations for improving the existing procedures?

Research Method

A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was employed. We held interviews with teachers who serve as subject coordinators, with regular teachers of various subjects and with the principal. We performed observations in classrooms in which the two above mentioned organizational procedures were being implemented, and distributed questionnaires to some 300 ninth-grade pupils so as to examine their attitudes and perceptions with regard to the two procedures.

Main Findings

As regards the teachers' points of view, the Opening Triads procedure, which was supposed to be applied to all the teaching in the school, was in fact implemented in only some of the subjects. From the professional pedagogical point of view, we found various models that matched the subjects and a varying degree of correspondence to the different student populations. From the organizational point of view, we found that there were necessary preconditions for Opening Triads, among them a need for conforming with the schedule, for the proximity of classes that were reorganizing into Opening Triads, and for advance planning and preparation headed by a responsible team member. In the context of
the social point of view, both teachers and pupils reported that the advantage of Opening Triads lay in breaking the routine and broadening the acquaintance between teachers and pupils and among the pupils themselves, but this advantage was not mentioned as a significant phenomenon. From the personal point of view, it transpired that Opening Triads was not suitable for different teachers to the same extent. The main question that arose concerned the investment of the teachers' time in planning and organization versus the benefit derived from the investment.

An examination of the pupils' attitudes and perceptions by means of the questionnaires revealed that they viewed Opening Triads as contributing mainly to becoming acquainted with new teachers, to a variation in learning methods and to a reinforcement of knowledge. In particular, the contribution to strengthening friendships and becoming acquainted with other pupils was mentioned. The interesting finding that emerged from an examination of the pupils' perspective showed that while some of them perceived the flexible division into learning groups as ability grouping, they generally did not report negative feelings with regard to the process. As opposed to the findings of studies on ability grouping (which Dror School seeks to avoid on principle), which describe feelings of frustration among children who are generally assigned to the lower groups and are so labeled, in the present research, the pupils accorded a low ranking to statements that described such feelings.

As regards Enrichment Curriculum – the additional curriculum – the most notable findings showed that there was no definition of or consensus with regard to the assignments pupils were asked to carry out, and that there were differences between subjects in the nature of the Enrichment Curriculum tasks and in the frequency and rate of their performance. There was a wide variety of Enrichment Curriculum examples, and the various subject teams did not reach a consensus regarding what the Enrichment Curriculum tasks should be and how the teachers should evaluate them. It transpired that the Enrichment Curriculum tasks were performed mainly by strong pupils, and that the enthusiasm displayed by seventh-grade pupils gradually diminished in the more advanced classes.

*Lessons and Implications*

During the course of the study, we made various suggestions to the school in the context of the findings that emerged. In addition, at the end of the study, we submitted a research report in which we presented the findings (Alpert, Bechar, Bachar, Bren, & Moshkovsky, 2004). We listed implications for general educational research knowledge in which we included suggestions for alternatives to ability grouping, and we discussed questions of school restructuring and change. Thus, the entire study included an evaluation of a school program and also dealt with general issues from the field of educational research.

*The Collaborative Research Team*

Since the main topic under investigation is the collaborative process itself, it is fitting to describe the researchers on the team and their roles in the research. Two
experienced researchers from Beit Berl College of Education (the authors), who are also teacher educators, lecturers and members of the Research and Evaluation Unit there, participated in the study. In addition, three junior-high-school teachers from Dror School participated. They were selected by the principal on the basis of his familiarity with them as teachers who were likely to take an interest in research activity in the school. The teachers joined the process of their own volition and out of a desire to participate in it. Two of them were math teachers with 21 and 16 years of seniority, respectively. The third teacher taught Bible studies and literature and had 16 years seniority.

The team members were all remunerated for their research work over the two-year duration of the study: the two college researchers received their remuneration from the budget of the Research and Evaluation Unit at Beit Berl College, and the three teachers were paid for research hours by the school. The school principal authorized these hours, thereby manifesting his support for the study and for the entire process out of an awareness of its aims: he believed that the teachers' participation in the process would serve as a type of training for their future participation in a research/evaluation and development team in the school.

**Research Procedure**

The research activity consisted of 13 meetings of the entire research team once in two or three weeks during the 2001-2002 academic year, and approximately another five meetings during the 2002-2003 academic year. The aim of the meetings was to plan the research, divide up the data collection work, analyze data, and plan the writing of the final report. Toward the end of 2001, there was also a meeting for planning the presentation of the research at an international conference on teacher education. The meetings were recorded and the minutes transcribed verbatim.

The minutes of the collaborative team meetings, the recordings of the interviews, and the field notes of interviews and observations were analyzed in accordance with qualitative research methodology (see, for instance, Cresswell, 1998, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The topics, categories and central issues arising from the texts were noted down during the research process and at the end of the data collection stage. The preliminary findings as well as the categories and distinctions that emerged from the analysis fueled the collaborative team meetings and led to the final analysis and writing up of the research report.

The data analysis dealt with the topic of the collaborative research – the instructional-organizational procedures – as well as with the properties, processes and challenges of the collaborative teamwork. All five researchers spent a morning planning the data analysis and going through some pages of the minutes together as training for the full process of the data analysis. Following this, each of the two groups of researchers took a copy of the data. Each of the academic researchers went through the data, took notes, identified categories and themes, and organized them into "chunks" of meaning (Creswell, 2003; Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997). They then combined the categories they had agreed upon for the final analysis and writing. The teacher researchers met to perform the analysis together. The categories and themes they identified were then combined with those of the academic researchers. It should be noted that since we had discussed the themes and
topics that emerged throughout the research process during our meetings, the formal, systematic examination of the transcribed minutes served mainly as a corroboration of what we observed and discussed previously. The main categories and topics related to the collaborative teamwork that evolved from the analyses are presented in the Findings section below.

Findings

The Work of the Collaborative Team

In this section, we will outline the course of the meetings of the two college researchers and the three teacher researchers from the school over the two-year research period as well as the main topics that arose from the transcribed minutes as the topics of the various meetings. Table 1 presents the main topics discussed in the collaborative team meetings in addition to the research activities performed in parallel to the meetings.

Table 1: Summary of the Meetings and Research Activity over the Two-Year Research Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting</th>
<th>Description of the topics of the meeting</th>
<th>Research actions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First year Meetings 1, 2</td>
<td>Clarification meetings in which the teachers who were candidates for participating in the research were introduced, as were the aims of the process and its general nature. Discussion of possible topics for collaborative research.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting 3</td>
<td>A meeting for finalizing the choice of research topic. This meeting was attended by the school principal. We decided on a preliminary questionnaire as a basis for an interview with the subject coordinators.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting 4</td>
<td>A joint clarification of what was known about the topic, leading to the formulation of the research questions.</td>
<td>Following the meeting, each team member conducted interviews with the subject coordinators at individually chosen times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 5</td>
<td>Planning a preliminary questionnaire as a basis for an interview with the subject coordinators. Planning the interview and dividing up the work among the team members.</td>
<td>Communication by e-mail. Organization of the findings into one summarizing table.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 6</td>
<td>Report of each team member on the findings of the interviews she conducted: preliminary summaries of what happens with the research topics from the interviews. An examination of the preliminary findings and further propounding of hypotheses.</td>
<td>Observations carried out in classes in which Opening Triads was implemented and interviews with the teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 7</td>
<td>Discussion of the possibility of influencing the school action with regard to the topic of Opening Triads and Enrichment Curriculum as a result of what the preliminary findings revealed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meetings 8, 9</td>
<td>Report on classroom observations including a self-report of the teacher researchers on their experience in Opening Triads in their classes. Discussion and interpretations of the nature of Opening Triads and Enrichment Curriculum as a result of what emerged from the observations and from the personal and practical knowledge of the teacher researchers.</td>
<td>Continuation of observations and interviews.</td>
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Table 1 (cont.)

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<tr>
<th>Meeting</th>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting 10</td>
<td>Continuation of the report on classroom observations and interviews with the teachers. Discussion of the findings from the observations and the interviews and the various models of Opening Triads that emerged in the different subjects. Examination of possibilities for action and of the chances of influencing the procedures. The recorded protocols of all the meetings were transcribed after each meeting and the transcribed protocols distributed for the perusal of all of the team members.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting 11</td>
<td>Discussion regarding the continuation of the research procedures, getting organized for the continuation of the discussion and interpretation of the nature of Opening Triads and Enrichment Curriculum.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting 12</td>
<td>Discussion regarding the relationships that were established between the team members and the teachers at the school. Discussion of the possibilities of the feedback and the contribution to the school. Self-examination of the affects of the process on the researchers up till now. Continuation of the discussion and interpretation of the nature of Opening Triads and Enrichment Curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 13</td>
<td>Estimates for presenting the research at an international conference on teacher education that was slated for the beginning of the summer. Decision regarding the main points that would be presented at the conference and the participation of the whole team in the session. Presentation of the research to the members of the College Research and Evaluation Unit by the two college researchers. Participation at an International Conference on Teacher Education. The team members all participated in the session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second year Meeting 1</td>
<td>Discussion of the possibilities of action and contribution to the school. Discussion of the suggestion to produce an instruction manual on the topic of Enrichment Curriculum. Getting organized for preparing questionnaires for the pupils on the topic of Opening Triads and Enrichment Curriculum. Development of ideas and a preliminary draft of the questionnaires. The two college researchers met to develop the questionnaires. The college researcher participated in a coordinators meeting at the school and presented the findings. A discussion took place during the meeting, which was attended by the principal.</td>
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Communication by telephone and e-mail with regard to the activities in the following academic year. Planning the presentation of the preliminary findings to the entire teaching staff. Presenting them in that framework in anticipation of the opening of the school year.
Table 1 (cont.)

<table>
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<th>Meeting</th>
<th>Task Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Examination and improvement of the draft of the questionnaires. Getting organized to distribute the questionnaires.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meeting with the school's pedagogic coordinator in order to discuss a suggestion to produce an instruction manual. Completion of the classroom observations. Distribution of the questionnaires to the pupils.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Report on the distribution of the questionnaires and planning the data analysis. Planning a meeting of the entire collaborative team with the school's pedagogic coordinator. The meeting with the coordinator did not take place because of time constraints on her part. A break of 2-3 months in activity, during which the research was presented at the international conference. The statistical processing of the questionnaires.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Report on the statistical analysis of the questionnaires on the topic of Opening Triads and Enrichment Curriculum and a discussion of the findings. An exercise in the qualitative analysis of the transcribed protocols of the research team's meetings. Getting organized for writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The three teacher researchers and college researchers meet and perform a qualitative analysis of the transcribed protocols following the exercise. Summing up and writing the quantitative part. Summing up and writing the qualitative part.</td>
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</table>

Table 1 displays a process whereby the research progressed according to the stages that are characteristic of qualitative research, with joint decision-making and a fairly equal division of labor. The college researchers guided and directed the methodological part and the teacher researchers contributed their practical knowledge, as will be described later on. From the outset of the data collection, clarifications and discussions were held with regard to the findings that emerged. Interpretations were offered, hypotheses proposed and an attempt was made to examine possibilities of implementation and action in the school as a result of the findings. Relationships with the school administration and with the other teachers as well as within the collaborative team were discussed. Initiatives were taken to present the research to various forums in the school, in the college and at academic conferences. The whole team participated in most of them. Data analysis was discussed and the qualitative part was performed mainly by the teacher researchers and one of the college researchers, while the analysis of the questionnaires was performed by the second college researcher with the assistance of the Research and Evaluation Unit at the college.

Below, we will list the main topics that emerged from the findings in the context of the work and action process of the collaborative team.
Properties of the Knowledge and Its Place in the Research Process

As expected, the knowledge that the college researchers contributed to the process was methodological and theoretical, while the knowledge furnished by the teachers was personal and practical. Both types of knowledge were reflected in different ways in the collaborative meetings and affected the research stages.

Step-by-step Methodological Knowledge

The fact that the college researchers were experienced in research dictated their predominance in directing the processes: guiding the activity, assuming responsibility for getting organized and asking questions with regard to what must be done from the methodological point of view in order to attain knowledge of particular types. Initially, the model that guided the researchers was the interpretative-qualitative research model according to which one first tries to find out "what is going on here" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Wolcott, 2001) with reference to data collection by means of qualitative research tools: interviews, observations and collection of documents. The directions pertaining to how to conduct an interview, what is done during an observation, and what written material should be collected were issued by the college researchers, but the decision-making with regard to work methods, data collection strategies and role distribution was done jointly. The college researchers assumed the role of organizing and managing the team and introduced knowledge regarding qualitative research – its nature and how to conduct it – to the group. However, from the moment the basic principles were introduced, each of the team members suggested ideas for the research procedures, contents for the questions in the interviews and observations, and ways of collating the research data that were collected.

While the methodological knowledge was indeed imparted to the teacher researchers by the college researchers, it moved step by step, piecemeal, and continuously during the course of the meetings, and from there it was put into practice by all of the team members. It may be said that at every stage of the research, there was a recursive process of presenting methodological knowledge and applying it in the field. This process has implications for the professional development of teachers through action research since it demonstrates how practitioners may develop knowledge and skills by actually conducting research in collaboration with professional researchers, as distinct from participating in formal academic courses and workshops (e.g., Kervin, 2003; Zeichner, 2003; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001; see also discussion in the theoretical section of this article).

The research knowledge was imparted to the teachers either by presenting a research tool and suggesting a method for collecting data, or through recommendations of how to handle the data already collected so as to elicit meanings and interpretations. Following are several extracts from the directions and guidance given by the college researchers during the various meetings:

- In the next meeting, we have to ... discuss ... what's going on here, what is the general picture that has emerged.
- We'll try to think of the things that have emerged from what we've investigated up till now that go beyond the obvious questions, beyond the clear, explicit questions.

- We're rebuilding the text. We did interviews. The interview itself, the things that are said to us, it's a photograph of reality. But in our heads we're already mulling over our understanding of what people told us and when you've summed up the things here ... then it's actually an understanding of the new text, it's actually an interpretation of the data.

Each one of the research team members presented to the team reports of the observations and the interviews that were held, in addition to anecdotes and cases from their experiences in the meetings with teachers and pupils for the purposes of the study. A great deal of activity was invested in getting organized and examining what had been done, what still needed to be done, and what should be done with what there was. While the college researchers offered directions based on methodological knowledge, the teachers suggested ties with and mediation between people and means in the school in order to promote the research. The more the team advanced with the research, the more discussions there were about reporting, organizing and collecting data, alongside discussions about the clarification, explanation and interpretation of what had been found, an examination of hypotheses and assumptions, the suggestion of observations and questions, and attempts to draw conclusions. The collaborative clarification of the data enabled the researchers to triangulate the observations of the college researchers with the understanding and knowledge of the teacher researchers, who viewed the phenomena from the perspective of their experience working at the school.

The Teachers' Personal and Practical Knowledge

Since the early 1980s, educational research has attributed great importance to the manner in which teachers think, plan their actions, weigh things up, make decisions and cope with problems of practice by activating reflective thinking (Berliner, 1986; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Schon, 1987). An extensive literature has dealt with clarifying and explaining the nature of teachers' practical and personal knowledge (Elbaz, 1983, 1990). Elbaz analyzed the characteristics of practical and personal knowledge as knowledge that is examined, learned and develops from the experience of teachers in the field. It is composed, among other things, of laws, practical principles and images of good teaching. The term teachers' wisdom of practice has been accepted to reflect a type of knowledge that is meaningful and important for the act of teaching and also serves as a suitable basis for developing research on teaching and approaches in teacher education (Clandinin & Connelly, 1987, 1995; Richardson, 1994; Shulman, 1987).

From the first meetings of the collaborative team, the teacher researchers' knowledge came to the fore, when, after selecting the research topics, Opening Triads and Enrichment Curriculum, and beginning to develop the investigation, they proposed some initial hypotheses:

- What I feel is that there's often Opening Triads so that we can say we've done it, they should leave us alone ...
- Actually, very little of the Triads idea is carried out at all and there are very few data ... The question will be why and how. And perhaps the conclusion will be that it wasn't tried out enough.

These hypotheses provided the academic researchers with some understanding of the apparent gap between what the teachers thought was expected of them and their attempts to meet such perceived expectations while trying to perform their daily roles at the school. Their observations and reflections expressed in our meetings provided insights that the academic researchers could not have furnished on their own.

While the college researchers addressed the research without sufficient understanding or systematic knowledge of the research topics, the teacher researchers knew the topics from their experience at the school. A situation arose in which the teachers wanted to advance and formulate observations while the college researchers tried to hold them back and slow them down so as to produce the observations and the interpretations from the research and from the systematic knowledge that had accumulated during the course of it:

Teacher researcher: OK. I'm at the stage of another one, I'm at an additional stage, because of my proximity both to the profession and to the [fellow teachers] ... I know a little more about them, so I already know the answers ...

In the course of the meetings the teachers told anecdotes and described related cases from their personal experience. These stories served to examine the hypotheses and the generalizations, to exemplify phenomena or to differentiate between specific cases and what generally happens. In the following example, the teacher describes her experience in Opening Triads:

Teacher researcher A: You know, something very weird happened to us with Opening Triads.
Teacher researcher B: What happened?
A: We opened the triad and it was really fascinating, and every group did a topic.
B: Last month?
A: Yes. But we had a certain program. They [the pupils] don't work with textbooks, we really didn't want to work with textbooks, but rather change the teaching methods. The style was Opening Triads ... What happened was that ... every group did a research project on a topic from the Book of Exodus, and it goes in chronological order of the events, and afterwards they start to present it. So what happened in fact was that the research work actually only took place during the lessons, not beyond that ... So it was already three lessons that they met up lesson after lesson for Opening Triads, but I didn't see most of the class because they're kind of spread out. I don't know the class. I lost the class, like, where are my pupils? Do you understand what happened here?

The teacher opens with a declaration about the manner in which the Opening Triads process occurred. Then she presents the problematic nature of the process and describes
how she actually "lost" most of her pupils and did not know what happened to them with regard to the topic she wanted to advance: a research project.

The teachers' knowledge included recalling the school history that was relevant to the issues under investigation. In the process of analyzing and interpreting the data, this knowledge afforded a comparison with the past and an examination of the meaning of the present situation against that background. In the next extract, the teacher researchers ponder aloud about what happened:

Teacher researcher A: I think that the ... nature of the place also changes the nature of Opening Triads because I remember in the past, when we opened triads and we had a space [consisting] of three adjacent classrooms, it was possible to move around. We opened the triad during the lesson according to topics or sub-topics ...
College researcher: But what's stopping you from opening the triad according to topics today as well? There's less mobility, but ...
Teacher researcher A: We had the math homeroom ...
Teacher researcher B: [Today] there is no homeroom and there aren't any classes according to subjects, either. In other words, once this was the math building, so all the math lessons, like, the math teachers' room was over there.
College researcher: And now it doesn't exist.
Teacher researcher: I remember that there was a fourth teacher for three classes and we tried out this work with kids with difficulties, and suddenly it was decided that the fourth teacher who was a reinforcement would come in ... we did all kinds of experiments and when there were those conditions, you could do it ...

Both the college researchers and the teachers brought personal life experiences that were external to the school and the research to the data analysis and interpretation. These stories contributed to the supportive atmosphere that was created and to the positive development of relationships, as is described below:

Teacher researcher: Last year, I spoke to the principal of my son's school and we complained about a few things that were happening there, and then she said, "We don't have a solution for [good] pupils like your son in the school." She told me this without any compunction whatsoever ... She said, "We don't have a solution, we have so many pupils with difficulties ..."

In addition to observations and insights, the teachers also provided useful practical information that helped in conducting the research. For example, they explained to the college researchers roles in the school that are not self-evident to the outsider, such as the role of subject coordinator:

Teacher researcher: But here it's written: "Questionnaire for the Coordinators".
College researcher: Right, a questionnaire for the coordinators ... How do they work? Do they work alone? They work with ...? What's their job definition?
Teacher researcher: The job of the coordinator is defined as team leader.
The teachers were helpful in the organization of the research. They knew to whom it was worthwhile distributing the questionnaires, where they could obtain written lists and telephone numbers, and in how many classes questionnaires could be handed out. This practical information was available to them as a result of the fact that they were at the school on a daily basis and could receive, organize, disseminate and impart information that was essential for conducting the research:

Teacher researcher: *There was a certain degree of importance in the mediation we could perform, as workers at Dror...I could talk to every one of the teachers and tell her, Listen, she’s going to come and interview you. That already created some kind of opening...*

*Relationships Among Participants: Flowing and Glitches*

The relationship that forms within the collaborative team is of great importance since it affects the team's progress and the efficacy of its work. The nature of the relations that form among people who work together toward a common goal has been discussed and examined in various studies. In a case study of student teachers’ field experience, Hart and Adams (1986), for instance, indicate components of collegiality and modeling that characterized the relations among the participants in pedagogy instruction. McLaughlin and Yee (1988) deem partnership and collegiality to be essential in creating an atmosphere of professionalism in the school culture. Moreover, they list common goals, the intention to solve problems, shared decision-making and so on as important components that must be fostered. Also trust is considered an important feature for developing good, productive relationships and partnerships (e.g., Kervin, 2003; Loughran & Russell, 1997). The school principal and his/her management patterns affect the manner in which the teamwork in the school develops. Rowan (1990), for instance, describes a control model in which the principal plays a pivotal role in supervising input and output processes, and another, different model of commitment, which is built on expanding teachers' autonomy and freedom of action and basing their loyalty to their work on personal identification with school goals and on being empowered by the management (see also Reitzug, 1994).

During the collaborative teamwork, several relationships were established between the various individuals who were directly or indirectly involved in the action research. The most important and crucial relationship was created between the two groups – the teacher researchers from the school on the one hand and the college researchers on the other. Other relationships were created between the teacher researchers and the college researchers – the collaborative team – and the teachers at the school who were not members of the team; and between the collaborative team and the principal. In total, we counted three types of relationships that were relevant to our study in addition to relationships between the principal and the entire school staff, which had no direct bearing on the study, but were nevertheless reflected in the team meetings and discussions.

*The Relations Between the Teacher Researchers and the College Researchers* – were characterized by the type of collaboration we had hoped to achieve: "flowing" rather than "glitches" – the latter being true of the relations between the team members and other individuals in the school. The collaboration was reflected in the ability to find time for the
meetings that were held both at the school and at the team members' homes. It was also evident in the goodwill with which task allocation, tool preparation and data collection were undertaken. All of the team members participated in the discussions. While there was an equal division of labor, sometimes one of the members volunteered to do more because the knowledge and/or experience was more easily accessible to her or she had more free time than the others. We did not encounter any difficulty in this area. In conversations about the nature of the relations among us, terms such as "mutual respect", "an atmosphere that's conducive" (to expressing emotions) and "flexibility" in leading the process and in the running of the team were mentioned:

Teacher researcher A: *These entire two hours were two very pleasant hours. It's something different that breaks the routine, gives [you] an opportunity to say the things you're thinking, you know, you want. You've got an opportunity. I found myself running away from jobs at Dror at some point, but this I love, this mutual investigation. There are people here with whom it's always suited me to work. I've worked with [teacher researcher B] and with [teacher researcher C] and you [college researcher], who have joined in, a very pleasant atmosphere, open and pleasant and comfortable, and the feeling is conducive...*

The pleasant, conducive and flexible relationship between the college researchers and the teacher researchers enabled them to express the frustrations that are inherent in the teacher's work in general and in the work of the teacher in an experimental school such as Dror School that demands increased involvement from its staff:

- *Altogether, in teaching, we give a lot, and it's impossible just to give all the time. We have staff meetings and a regular in-service course besides everyone's studies.*

- *There's a big workload and everything is done thoroughly out of some kind of desire to stand behind some kind of idea ...*

- *We were infused with motivation. I volunteered for the Teachers Union and for this and that, then I understood that it's so minor, without limits, there's no appreciation and no payment for anything, and payment is not just financial ... Take [name deleted], for instance – she was a coordinator ... She said, Next year [I'm going to be] just a plain teacher ... You understand what's happening to people? Take me, for instance. ... What happens in the end? Can you tell me why I need it [a management position]? I'll do my [teaching] work to the best of my ability, at best, and I don't want all the titles ... I have a home.*

As a natural part of the conversation in the meetings and apparently as a part of the lulls that were necessary in the discussions, conversations were held among the participants on topics outside of the common one. There were conversations about the participants' children, books, computers, and so on. Comments in the context of work conditions also cropped up: income, remuneration, docked salary for absenteeism, and so on. These also enhanced the feeling of closeness that was created within the team.
The Relations between the Researchers and the Teachers at the School – While the relations within the team were simple and positive, those between the team members and the teachers at the school were complex and diverse and ranged from cooperation and goodwill on the one hand to suspicion, mistrust and fear of being hurt on the other. We described these as "glitches" as opposed to the "flowing" relations within the team. The glitches occurred when it transpired that the questions we had chosen to ask – the nature of Opening Triads and Enrichment Curriculum in the school – were liable to cause some of the teachers to become defensive, perhaps because of the discrepancy between what they thought was expected of them and what actually took place. The fear that the team members were evaluators or that they were "collaborating" with the management emerged in different forms in the team discussions – for instance, during a discussion on devising questions for the interview with the teachers:

Teacher researcher A: It shouldn't look as if we're keeping tabs on someone because there is an expectation that it [Opening Triads] will happen and anybody who doesn't do it doesn't feel good, as if he isn't fulfilling the expectations of the school.
Teacher researcher B: I don't want the teachers to think that I'm a collaborator.
Teacher researcher C: Whatever we do, however we present it, even if we stand as a team in front of the people and tell them, there'll always be someone who thinks that we are part of the management system ...We'll never be able to be clean and that's not comfortable. I agree that that's not comfortable.

In order to cope with the teachers' suspicion, we took several steps during the course of the study with the aim of bringing our activity closer to the teachers. We requested and received assurances that the information we were going to hand over to the management not be used against individual teachers. This was done so that the teachers would not feel any criticism stemming from the team's activity that may hurt them personally. In addition, during the personal conversations with various teachers at the school, we each explained what we were doing. In the meetings with groups of teachers as well as in a full forum of all the teachers convened by the principal at the beginning of the school year, we presented the research.

Some teachers' misgivings were expressed in their reluctance to be interviewed or to allow the college researchers to observe their lessons. Conversely, all of the coordinators and most of the teachers responded wholeheartedly and positively to our request and were not only interviewed extensively but also threw open their classroom doors, as described by one of the teacher researchers on the team: I think that teachers found an opportunity to really say what they felt. Those I interviewed...I felt that they really opened up and let it all out ...

Relations between the Researchers and the Management – The principal is a central figure in any school and his/her influence on the spirit, culture, ethos, organization, teaching and learning is documented extensively (e.g., Anderson, 1989; Clark & Clark, 1996; Huber & West, 2002). The principal of Dror established the school and developed his vision. He was present as an influential figure in all areas of activity in the school. The principal recognized the importance of the study and supported it. However, since we were
dealing with organizational procedures in the school that were introduced and promoted by the principal as a part of the school vision, we had to relate to his expectations of, his attitudes toward, and his reactions to what was emerging in the research. It transpired that there was a certain discrepancy between our perception, the teachers' perception and the principal's perception of the topic of Opening Triads and Enrichment Curriculum in the school. The principal related flexibly to the idea of Opening Triads and did not insist on implementing it punctiliously – contrary to what the teachers thought. With regard to Enrichment Curriculum, the teachers provided numerous interpretations, and their attitude toward the topic was ambivalent. In contrast, the principal demanded systematic action from the teachers in encouraging the pupils to do Enrichment Curriculum work. The principal's attitudes toward the topics under investigation caused our team to examine our research actions and the manner in which we faced the teachers in meetings and asked them for information and conclusions. At times, we knew what the principal's attitude was, but at others, it was not clear to us. To a certain extent, there was an attempt to walk the thin line between the principal's expectations as we understood them and our resolve to conduct independent, authentic research without the influence of external desires and expectations.

In Figure 1, we present a summary of the main properties of the relationships between the various factors directly or indirectly involved in the present action research:

Figure 1: Relationships Between Participants: Flowing and Glitches
To sum up: In this collaborative study, which entailed a long period of time for conducting the research in the field, the relationships between the various participants in the study became complex and gave rise to questions with regard to what was appropriate and what was inappropriate, and how to avoid harming the status and credibility of the participants, at the same time remaining loyal to the interpretations and the observations that emerged.

The Influence of the Process on the Teacher Researchers

In a conversation that summed up the team members' first year of activity, the teacher researchers described some of the effects of the research process. In the following excerpt, the teacher researcher spoke about the reinforcement and clarification of the thoughts and perceptions that had arisen from the research process:

- *If just like that, in an associative way, I'd be asked: OK, you finished a year, you were in a [research] team, what did it do? – the first thing that comes into my head is that it simply reinforced everything I had thought and felt happens in the school in the context of Opening Triads and Enrichment Curriculum. It simply reinforced. I received reinforcement during the interviews for things I felt and thought were happening, and this, this team, the participation in this team ... gave me personally some kind of strength to stand up and say it out loud ...*

- *An image comes into my head. It's like a puzzle that's spread out all over and with the help of this team, the interviews, the observations, we've really begun put the pieces of the puzzle together and the picture is more whole, clearer.*

From the above words as well as from an examination of the transcripts of the conversations over the course of two years of work, it transpired that participation in the collaborative team not only enhanced the teacher researchers' interest and gave them a new way of coping with their work, but also provided them with a place to formulate ideas and perform an in-depth examination of insights pertaining to the issues with which they had dealt. Vague ideas and emotions were discussed directly and thoroughly in the meetings of the collaborative team as a result of a need to explain and understand the meaning of the data we collected. The attitudes and standpoints of the teacher researchers as participants in the processes of teaching and learning, as teachers who were gaining experience in Opening Triads and Enrichment Curriculum, and as members of teams of teachers in which the topics came up one way or another, became intermingled with their interpretative work as researchers who observe and analyze the data. They combined emic and etic perspectives in the analysis and formulation of their interpretations. Those in turn were combined with the interpretations of the college researchers who were participants-observers with an external viewpoint (Spindler & Hammond, 2000).
The Influence of the Process on the College Researchers

As the two academic researchers, we (the authors) have been reflecting about our experiences both during and after the collaborative study. We are teacher educators who are interested in educational research, work in the Research and Evaluation Unit at our college, and teach education courses to student teachers and experienced teachers who are studying toward their B.Ed. degree and teaching certification. However, we do not work in schools on a regular basis. The collaborative study afforded us an opportunity to "go back to school", connect with the field of education, and gain some understanding of processes related to curriculum and instruction in schools. The involvement with the research team enabled us to get close to the teachers’ lives in their school, to their ways of thinking about their practice, to their gains as well as their difficulties, and to their interpretations of social, organizational and instructional issues and challenges.

We visited the school regularly during the first year of the study and less frequently during the second year. Thus, while we were close to the three teacher researchers with whom we collaborated, we remained quite detached from what was happening at the school on a daily basis. Since we were deeply involved in our teaching duties at the college, the amount of time we could spend at the school was limited. Indeed, we could only obtain a partial picture and were dependent on the information proffered by the teacher researchers. Their assistance in providing information and interpreting what was going on at the school as regards the topics of investigation, including perspectives about the school's history, was crucial. However, since we were working toward establishing an egalitarian process in which all five researchers shared the research assignments and divided up the observations and the interviews, we entered classrooms for observations and spoke at length with school practitioners in our interviews with them.

We wondered what value the collaborative study held for us. As college researchers, we were interested in research. This kind of involvement with research has recently attracted the attention of some educational researchers (e.g., Cochran-Smith, 2003, 2005). However, it may have been simpler to be external researchers, either conducting ethnographic studies or involved in evaluation as external evaluators. In such capacities, we would not have had to commit ourselves to attending regular meetings and establishing relations with the teacher researchers, as described above.

Nevertheless, our motivation to initiate and conduct the collaborative study evolved from our belief in the value of participatory research as a type of research that reduces status and power gaps between academic researchers and the participants in their research. This promotion of just and equal values has been proposed in the literature on participatory research and evaluation, particularly in the emancipatory and transformative traditions presented in our theoretical background above (e.g., Boog, 2003; Cousins & Whitmore, 1998; Cassell & Johnson, 2006). Since we were not members of the school staff, we were aware of our limited ability to capture what was going on at the school with regard to the topic of our investigation. Paradoxically, this limitation put us on an equal footing with the teacher researchers, whose limitation resided in the fact that they did not share our knowledge of and familiarity with research methodology. Both the limitations and the strengths of the academic researchers and the teacher researchers served the participatory spirit of our joint project.
We learned that finding ways to be more involved in the schools with which we collaborate in conducting research may strengthen the contribution both to the participatory endeavor and to the utilization focus of the collaborative evaluation (Patton, 2000; Stufflebeam, 2001). Thus, collaborative research of this type may be more suitable for teacher educators who supervise student teachers or researchers who serve as school advisors on various projects. Combining supervision of student teachers, advisory functions and research activities may increase the extent of involvement in the school and subsequently lead to the close relations with the school participants that are important for more thorough and meaningful collaborative research and evaluation.

Conclusion, Discussion and Recommendations

In the present study, we described a process of collaborative evaluation research performed by a team comprising researchers and teachers. The research was not planned in advance as evaluation research. The discussion of a topic that was significant to the school and that was worthwhile investigating gave rise to the need to examine how an approach that is a part of the school's vision is reflected in the teaching and learning, and what its characteristics are. The questions we asked arose from the discussions and were not dictated or formulated in detail beforehand, while the research procedures developed during the work process. In retrospect, it can be said that our case study possessed characteristics that made it possible to learn lessons with regard to evaluating the school. In the discussion below, we will first present the main findings from the case study as action research and as a collaborative process. We will then examine the research according to the properties of evaluation research and make recommendations for developing a possible model of collaborative evaluation.

The Study as Action Research

The study describes action research that developed in two directions: (1) we dealt with a continuous action of collaborative research work, with the activity and the research procedures themselves constituting an action whose aim was to foster the notion of collaboration and examine it, and (2) we investigated the work of the school and the teachers regarding the organizational procedures – Opening Triads and Enrichment Curriculum. Here, we achieved the aim of the action research, which was a better understanding of these processes and the possibilities of improving them. We accomplished the following objectives of action research:

1. Advancing practitioners' knowledge and insight: Through the work, we developed our knowledge as college researchers and as teacher educators with regard to the collaborative model we aspired to realize and examine. The teacher researchers were partners in advancing the knowledge of a collaborative process and in examining its difficulties as well as its contributions. The knowledge and the insight of all of the researchers as regards the educational issues of coping with heterogeneity by means of organizational structures within the school were also advanced.
2. Improvement of practice by means of change: We exerted a certain degree of influence on the processes in the school, but our main achievement lay in recommendations for change and improvement, which we conveyed to the management and the teachers in various forums as well as in the research report.

3. Empowerment of the practitioners and their advancement to the status of producers of knowledge: The empowerment emerged from the process itself, as was evident from the discussions and conversations of the team as well as from the work on the research and the procedures leading to its dissemination in the school, the college and academic forums.

The Collaborative Process

We believe that overall, the model we chose was successful. In other words, the sequence in which the college researchers and the teachers held meetings so as to plan, implement, discuss and interpret research data was effective and positive, according to all participants. The fact, too, that we concluded the research procedures with a consensus, summed up the findings, wrote the final report and presented the findings in various forums further attested to this success. Naturally, the contribution of the knowledge to the research was linked to the participants' backgrounds. As expected, the college researchers contributed theoretical and methodological knowledge, whereas the teacher researchers contributed personal and practical knowledge. Together, we combined the external and internal knowledge and the methodological and practical knowledge in a manner that enabled the research to advance properly.

We described the relationships that developed during the process and the problems concerning the role of the researchers and the research in the context of the relations with the teachers at the school and with the management. We pointed out the "glitches" in the relations when it was feared that the teachers at the school would perceive the researchers to be evaluating and inspecting the extent to which they implemented what was considered to be the desired policy of the management. The problem was particularly significant with regard to the relations between the teacher researchers and their colleagues in the school. We described how both teacher researchers and the college researchers took various actions in order to cope with the fear and the suspicion and to dispel them: making an agreement with the principal about our role, and presenting the research to the teachers as individuals or in teams so as to create a measure of transparency. The relations within the team were characterized as "flowing": pleasantness, mutual respect, flexibility and cooperation. The equal status enjoyed by all of the team members from the point of view of each one's contribution to the knowledge and the research enhanced this positive relationship. We described how, in addition to discussions regarding the research content, the team served as a framework for expressing work-related frustrations as well as for sharing personal experiences.

Lessons Learned for Collaborative Evaluation Research

The topic that was chosen for the collaborative research study, Opening Triads and Enrichment Curriculum – two organizational procedures whose aims were to afford a
flexible organization of groups in the school and to encourage excellence – reflected the school vision of being an institution in the process of improvement and restructuring that met the needs of its heterogeneous population without labels or streaming. The decision to investigate this topic brought us to the threshold of school evaluation. The questions regarding the properties of the organizational procedures in the school, their advantages, their inherent difficulties, and the ways of improving them, were evaluation questions. The fact that the research approach we adopted was predominantly qualitative focused the inquiry on processes rather than on products. As the study developed, a need arose to examine the manner in which the pupils perceived the processes under investigation. We therefore reached a decision to use quantitative tools – questionnaires – which we distributed to the entire ninth grade so that the pupils could provide us with a picture based on their experience of the research topics. It can be said that we performed knowledge-assisted systematic actions for the purpose of describing educational objectives and for determining their value or advantages, as Nevo (1995) has argued. We found that at a certain point, suspicions arose regarding the possibility that the researchers, especially the teacher researchers, were collaborating with the management with the intention of keeping track of and examining the procedures that the management was keen to promote. In order to overcome these "glitches", we took steps, as described previously, to report to the school staff and keep them informed as much as possible.

The model that developed corresponds to school-based evaluation, which is a combination of internal and external evaluation. In recent years, the need for this type of evaluation has increased along with the tendency in the education system to develop school autonomy, to encourage teachers' participation in decision-making and to reinforce educators' professionalism (Nevo, 1995, 2002). The conclusions we reached from the research can serve as a basis for a model of collaborative evaluation research:

1. There is a major advantage to collaboration between teachers and researchers from academia. As we have shown, teachers have practical knowledge that is valuable for understanding educational phenomena. Researchers contribute methodological and theoretical knowledge to the process, thereby reinforcing the research processes and providing a basis for producing general educational knowledge.

2. Collaboration is a value that should be built on the practical needs of each of the researchers and the institutions they represent on the one hand, and on the fostering of equal and supportive relations within the collaborative team on the other. In the research described above, all of the researchers participated out of interest in the research topic and the process. From the teachers' point of view, participating in the research served as a break in their teaching routine and as a possible basis for assuming evaluation and development roles in their school. From the college researchers' point of view, it gave them an opportunity to engage in empirical educational research, which is a part of their academic activity. In addition, the regular meetings, the equal division of labor in planning the inquiry and in collecting and analyzing data as well as the chance to share experiences from professional and everyday lives, all contributed to a positive and supportive atmosphere that permitted the research to be conducted productively.
3. To a certain extent, the relations among the teachers at the school, the teacher researchers, the principal and the college researchers were fraught with "glitches". By presenting the findings to the school staff regularly, reporting to them and updating them with regard to the research actions and results, transparency was created that may well have reduced the tension sparked by this type of research.

4. Participation in action research and/or collaborative evaluation research is recommended as a means of teachers' professional development, as discussed before. A process of this kind can replace traditional models of teachers' in-service courses in which external experts impart contents to them by means of lectures and workshops.

5. A process of this kind enables evaluation teams to be trained in the school, thereby strengthening the school from the point of view of its ability to evaluate and improve the processes that are implemented in it. Nevo (1995) claims that learning while doing is still the best way to acquire the skill of evaluation.

In conclusion, the case study presented here may contribute to understanding the ways in which participatory evaluation interacts with action research in the daily practice of school teaching and learning. It may be considered a worthwhile model for collaborative evaluation research that can meet the evaluation needs of schools, foster ties between educational institutions and academia, and contribute to the advancement of general educational knowledge.

References


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