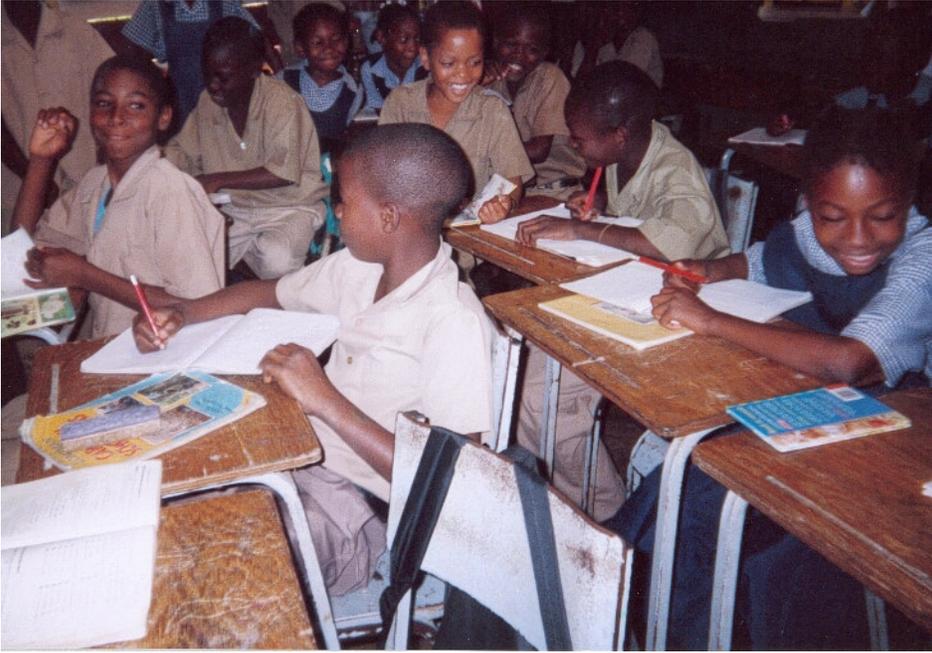


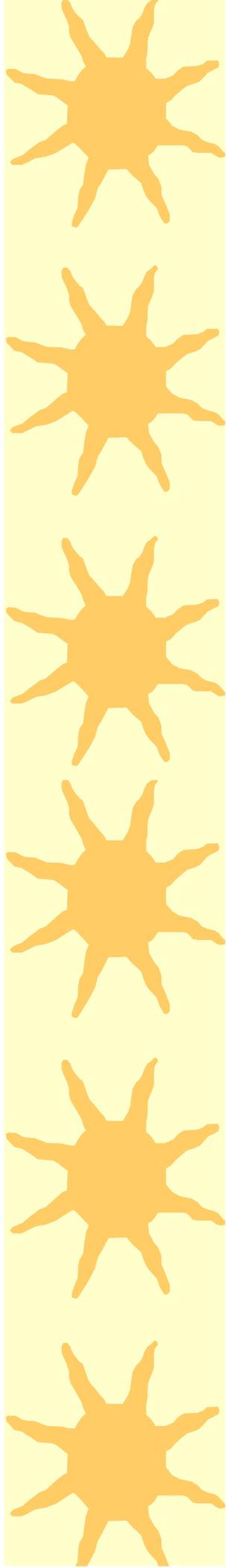
A Sense of Self Worth

## A Sense of Self Worth



## Action Research in the Jamaica All Age Schools Project

Jamaica All Age Schools Project  
2003



## **A Sense of Self Worth**

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This publication examines the use of Action Research as part of the Jamaica All Age Schools Project (JAASP) which ran for 3 years between 2000 and 2003. The direct beneficiaries of the project are the children and communities in the most disadvantaged, remote rural areas of Jamaica. JAASP specifically aimed to tackle the key issues of Access, Quality, Retention and Equity in relation to rural education. One of the underlying principles behind the project has been the building of partnerships between schools, parents, communities, Ministry of Education officers and the private sector to develop improved lifetime opportunities for rural children. The voices of different participants are included here and are evidence of the project focus on 'learning for all'

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### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **The Jamaica All Age Schools Project**

Funded by the UK Government Department for International Development as part of its programme to eliminate poverty, and in collaboration with the Government of Jamaica, JAASP worked with 48 remote rural All-Age schools from April 2000 to May 2003. These schools, located in clusters in each of the six education regions of the island, were afforded the lowest status by the community at large, being characterised by

- low rates of student achievement
- high rates of absenteeism
- low levels of community and financial support
- inadequate buildings
- minimum resources for learning

As a consequence, they produced students who were least qualified for work or upper secondary education. Against this background, JAASP specifically aimed to tackle the key issues identified by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture: Access, Quality, Retention and Equity.

The overall purpose of the project was to provide better education for children in poor rural communities and, through this, to contribute to improved lifetime opportunities for them. The direct beneficiaries of the project were the children and communities in the most disadvantaged, remote rural areas of Jamaica. There were wider benefits for all through the development of sustainable systems at central and regional levels.

The key underpinning principles of the project can be summarised as follows:

- respecting, and building on, the existing work of Jamaican educators
- involving all stakeholders through a participatory approach
- developing ownership of the project through autonomy and accountability of stakeholders
- engaging parents and the community in the life of the school and their children's education
- including community development as a key component for sustainability
- recognising diversity within the classroom
- developing a learning culture: a focus on learning for all and on everyone sharing what they have learned

There were several main components to the project, which interfaced with each other to provide a holistic approach to tackling the multiple problems identified in the baseline survey. These were:

1. Community/ School Participation
2. School Management
3. Quality of Teaching and Learning
4. Strengthening Regional and National Systems
5. Teaching and Learning Resources
6. Minor Rehabilitation Works
7. Lesson Learning

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### **The importance of lesson learning**

Before the project began, individual teachers and individual project schools tended to work in isolation, often with little access to new ideas and practices and a lack of opportunity for discussion and experimentation. Decision-making was a top-down process, which did not involve stakeholders as equal partners, with valid perspectives, in educational development. Educational research by the University of the West Indies and Teachers Colleges was restricted in the field to those schools which were most easily accessible (that is, not in remote rural areas). The project was designed to redress inequalities in all these aspects.

Additionally, the development of local capacity for lesson learning and sharing was seen as an important element in sustaining the gains of the project once it came to an end. One way that this could be achieved was through the participation of a wide range of stakeholders in monitoring and evaluation activities. Another strategy was the integration of action research into the project, providing support for small-scale action research projects, through which individual schools identified a particular problem and worked collaboratively to solve this. Finally, the intention was to share good practice with non-project schools and so stimulate the wider use of successful project innovations.

Key activities in this component included the following:

**Baseline Study and Community Survey:** carried out at the beginning of the project in 20 schools, involving questionnaires, classroom observation and focus group discussions with students, teachers, members of the School Board, PTA and the rest of the community

**Monitoring mechanisms:** progress has been overseen by a National Steering Committee and 6 Regional Coordinating Committees; annual monitoring visits by the University of Wolverhampton have involved discussions with a wide range of stakeholders in schools, communities and Regional Education Offices

**Training in Action Research:** all project schools, a number of Education Officers, staff from Teachers Colleges and Community Participation Facilitators had basic training in action research and a training guide was developed for use in schools

**Dissemination:** at all levels, through School Open Days, school and project newsletters, workshops, meetings, school cluster groups, videos, training manuals, national and international conferences and publications.

### **The Role of Action Research**

Through such activities, a culture of learning has been developed among stakeholders. Regular sharing of lessons learned takes place within and between schools and communities and between regions. There is an ethos of open-ness, exploration and experimentation, a recognition of continuing personal and professional development, as opposed to 'right or wrong' quick answers and simple solutions

Small-scale action research projects have been successfully completed in 15 schools. They relate closely to, and draw on, other aspects of JAASP - in particular, raising

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achievement in literacy; the impact of community projects; and improving participation of boys in education. The projects have helped to raise awareness of specific problems and possible ways of addressing them - and in this way have contributed to a deeper understanding of factors affecting education in remote rural areas of Jamaica for the first time. Equally important is the fact that the process has helped to develop reflective practice among teachers themselves...

Dasmine Kennedy, a Jamaican consultant, was employed to support action research in JAASP schools and to help document the process for a wider audience. This paper is a compilation of the work she carried out for the project between January 2002 and March 2003. It outlines the principles behind action research and how it has been implemented in project schools. It analyses the key lessons learned from the introduction of action research into remote rural schools, highlighting the positive impact on teachers, schools, families, communities and, most importantly, on the students who were targeted. Her conclusion is that, if all stakeholders implement a culture of practitioner research in school, student underachievement can be reduced.

**Patricia Daniel**  
**Series Editor**

### **Other paper in this series include**

*Community Participation and Beneficiary Assessment*  
Aldin Bellinfantie

*School Development Planning and School Management*  
Patt Flett

*Approaches to Teaching Literacy*  
Kevin Walsh

*Special Needs*  
Patricia Johnson

*The Rôle of Participation in Change*  
Mary Surridge

*The Impact of Study and Link Visits*  
Ray Mace

*Impact Assessment of the Jamaica All Age School Project*  
Pat Daniel

### WHAT IS ACTION RESEARCH?

According to Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) action research is research in practice, by practitioners, for practitioners. It is a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by professionals to develop understanding of, and thereby to enhance, their own practice. In this way it contributes to professional development, through improving skills and knowledge, and also, through addressing professional problems, it contributes to improved quality of service.

In education, action research has been employed in school-based curriculum development, school improvement programmes, systems planning and policy development. It has evolved as an effective alternative to academy-based research, a more teacher-centred method of 'discovery' where teachers are encouraged to find answers for themselves. The approach has recently been introduced in Jamaica through both the MEd programme at University of the West Indies and the DipEd at Teachers Colleges, where students carry out practical assignments during placement in practice schools.

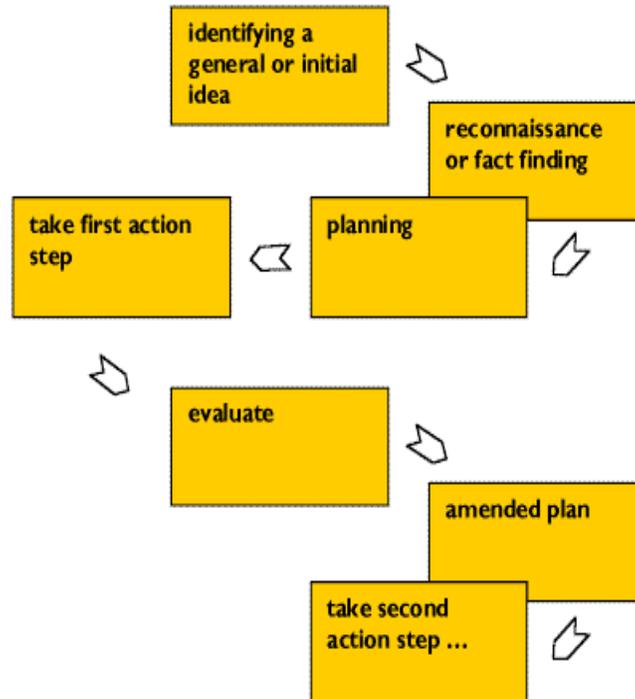
Action research is an interactive and collaborative process, in which all actors are equal participants who should take part in each stage of the research. It requires a special kind of 'symmetrical communication' which allows all participants and partners to communicate on equal terms. "Collaborative participation in theoretical, practical and political discourse is thus the hallmark of action research and the action researcher" (op.cit:143).

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992) this systematic approach to collaborative data collection and problem-solving can contribute to social change in a number of ways. It helps raise awareness of problems, gives participants a better understanding of self, develops their confidence, strengthens their commitment and encourages active involvement towards shared goals.

Halsey (1972) defines action research as "a small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world... and the close examining of the effects of such interventions." Lewin (1948) is recognised as one of the originators of the approach; he argued that, for change to occur, one has to have knowledge of the situation in order to implement new strategies. The implemented strategies should then be studied carefully so that modification can be made. His approach involves a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action and fact-finding about the result of the action (see Fig. 1).

Looking at the process in more detail, there are certain key questions to be asked at each stage of the cycle and these form the basis for ongoing discussion among the actors involved (see Fig. 2). In particular, the formulation of the research hypothesis (problem statement) as a specific question or series of questions, which can be addressed throughout and at the end of the research, is extremely helpful in the reflection process and in evaluation.

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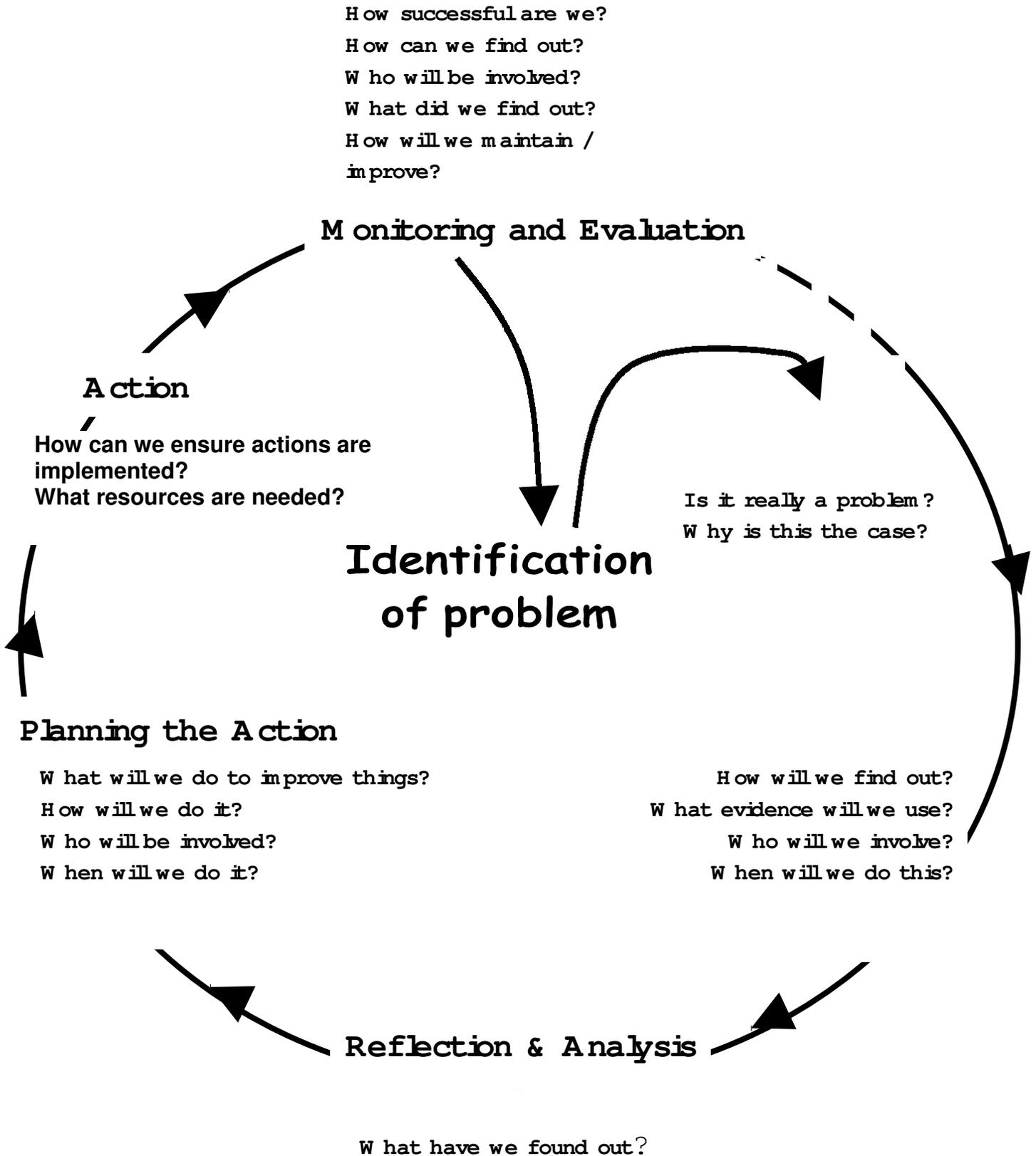
**Fig. 1. The Action Cycle (Lewin, 1948)**

The Problem Statement should be clearly defined and based on specific objectives and the kind of data that is required. The action researcher delves deeply into what s/he wants to learn, what is already known and how s/he might move from the known the unknown. S/he uses techniques of investigation that are appropriate to the problem definition and attempts to take into account all relevant factors, in order to clarify to herself and to others the results of the action. S/he gives others a chance to arrive at their own interpretation and to repeat or go beyond the study.

As with conventional approaches, it is important to conduct a review of existing documents and related research, which can help to identify new or productive questions for your own investigation and possible strategies or procedures to consider. While this can seem time-consuming for classroom teachers, there are certain documents readily to hand - for example, students' tests results, homework, reading scores – which can be used as a starting point for reflection. The ideal is to integrate action research into your everyday work, as an aspect of everyday practice. At the same time, locating your project within a wider framework can facilitate interpretation of the results (see Beaumont et al, 1997: 45) and have a wider influence on practice.

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Fig. 2 Questions in the Action Research Cycle (Daniel, Mace and Flett, 2001)



## DEVELOPING THE ACTION RESEARCH APPROACH IN THE JAMAICA ALL AGE SCHOOLS PROJECT

An initial introduction to action research was provided through an international consultancy at the end of the first year of the JAASP project. Workshops were held in each region and a total of 62 educators took part in the programme, including a range of stakeholders: 20 Principals, 18 Education Officers, 8 Community Participation Facilitators, 4 Senior Teachers, 3 Teacher Trainers and the 4 members of the Project Team.

In the process of the workshops, participants were encouraged to develop their own topics for action research which were major concerns within their own situation. Feedback from all the workshops was positive, with participants indicating that the experience had been “illuminating, informative, interactive,” it had “encouraged participation and critical thinking” and “enabled one to express one’s feelings freely” (Daniel and Mace, 2001). Many were keen to try out the approach. One Education Officer decided to multiply the training for all the schools in her cluster and representatives from Moneague Teachers College made plans to implement action research with their Second Year students in one of the JAASP schools through the Language Arts programme.

Research topics focussed mainly on questions on literacy development, but also included the following: numeracy problems; gendered differences in performance and ways of learning; ways of promoting professional development / motivation; classroom management. There was an emphasis on investigating levels of performance at Grade Four and, in addition, general issues around attendance and parental support were discussed. The majority of proposals included interaction with parents, community members, colleagues and students.

While the initial plan was to start implementation in September 2001, JAASP was unable to provide a sufficient level of support to all interested schools. However, a small number of JAASP schools did manage set up their own action research project. One notable example was Morgan’s Pass, where the Principal, Mr Errol Bailey, targeted (and transformed) a group of under-achieving boys through the use of an integrated approach involving sports, music and art. The boys became alert and motivated and developed a sense of worth as a result of the creative and meaningful intervention employed. Errol Bailey stated one of his conclusions in the following way:

**“If students don’t learn the way we teach, probably we should teach the way they learn.”**

As part of the next wave of training (which was carried out by the national consultant and targeted a number of JAASP schools in each region) this example from Morgan’s Pass was presented and proved a motivating factor in the wider adoption of action research. In fact, two other schools multiplied the Morgan’s Pass experiment, with similar success. Mr Bailey’s “success story” was published in the JAASP Newsletter (No.2, 2002 reproduced in Daniel, 2003) and served as a model for other schools in writing up their own experiences.

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A practical guide to carrying out action research was developed for use in schools and this included, to make the process more teacher-friendly, another worked example (see Box 1 below). Schools were advised to plan and monitor their project using an Action Research Timeline (see Appendix A). In addition, keeping a journal or diary was recommended for both teachers and students, as a way to document the process, to record thoughts, feelings and questions and to reflect change over time (see Box 2).

Between April and June 2002 the national consultant visited 15 targeted JAASP schools to meet staff and facilitate the development of an action research Problem Statement. Follow-up visits were made to support schools in planning, implementing and monitoring strategies to address the problem under investigation (see Kennedy, 2002b). The common agreement was to continue implementation in September (the start of the next school year).

In January 2003, the consultant visited the schools again to collect their completed project documentation and to carry out an evaluation of the process with relevant participants, helping them to reflect on problems and challenges, lessons learned and the impact of action research. Three schools (including one from outside the original 15) agreed to write up other activities: in fact, they realised they had been doing action research all along but didn't know it! One of these is Gurney's Mount, whose involvement with the private sector had begun in 1996 as part another project – the School Community Outreach Programme for Education (S.C.O.P.E.) – and whose experiences are included at the end of this publication.

### **Box 1.**

#### **Introducing Action Research at Guinep Tree All Age School (from Kennedy, 2002a)**

**Mrs. Roache:** I am having a big problem with my grade 5 class.

**Mr. Gayle:** What is your problem Mrs. Roache?

**Mrs. Roache:** That set of boys is going to drive me crazy. Too many boys are in my class and they cannot do a thing.

**Mr. Gayle:** What do you mean?

**Mrs. Roache:** I told you they come to class everyday sit in the back rap and sing. That' s all they seemed to be interested in. I cannot get them to read

**Mr. Gayle:** Ay! Mrs. Roache your boys are interested in music! Why don' t you use music to help them to read?

**Mrs. Roache:** You getting off your head or something? I don' t even know anything about music.

**Mr. Gayle:** Use the same songs that they sing in class. As a matter of fact you can engage in Action Research.

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**Mrs. Roache:** Action Research? What is that? I never like research from college days and I do not have time for complicated research now.

**Mr. Gayle:** No Mrs. Roache. Action Research is not complicated. It is a practitioner' s research for Practitioners that allows one to research one' s problem and put strategies in place to alleviate them. The good thing about action research is that it can be carried out in your own class time.

**Mrs. Roache:** So Mr. Gayle how can action research help with my boys?

**Mr. Gayle:** I am glad you asked that question. Let's take your boys for instance; they demonstrate interest in music. You can use their interest to your advantage, to get them to read, among other things.

**Mrs. Roache:** What do I do?

**Mr. Gayle:**

Step 1: Discuss the situation with someone, possibly the principal and other staff to get support.

Step 2: Identify the problem and write the problem statement.

This is how we go about writing a problem statement for action research.

A. First identify the variables: these are-grade 5 boys, music and literacy reading.

B. Use key words such as' investigate will substantiate whether an investigation into seek to find out etc.

Let us attempt to write the Problem Statement for your research.

### ***PROBLEM STATEMENT***

An investigation into whether the use of music will enhance literacy among a group of boys at Guinep Tree All Age School.

**Mrs. Roache:** That was easier than I thought. Could I use the same idea for other subject areas?

**Mr. Gayle:** Sure in fact you can use the integrated approach to introduce other subjects while focusing on literacy. We need to do something else, Mrs. Roache. We have developed a Problem Statement, we need to write the Background to the problem and construct research questions. The Background to the Problem is simple you need to put the problem in context and write a page or two giving further details about the problem.

Let us attempt to write the research questions.

**Mrs. Roache:** Research Questions? I told you that I do not have time for so much work.

**Mr. Gayle:** Relax! the process is much easier than you thought. The Problem Statement serves as a guide to the process. Do you remember the variables that were identified earlier? These variables will provide the basis for the research questions.

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***N.B. the research questions are situations that we are seeking answers to...***

These will be answered throughout and at the end of the research process.

Let us remind ourselves of the variables. They are Grade 5 boys, music and literacy. These will be tested to ascertain whether the desirable changes were achieved. Therefore we need to ask questions about them.

### ***Key Words for Questioning***

What will be. . . ? Will there be. . . ? Will there be a significant....? How will. . . ?  
What effect will. . . ? How significant will be. . . ?

### ***Research Questions***

1. What effect will the use of music have on the boy' s literacy development?
2. Will there be a significant level of improvement in the boys' literacy level?
3. What will be the boys' reaction to the musical intervention?

**Mrs. Roache:** I am enjoying this process so far. What do I do next?

**Mr. Gayle:** I am glad you asked. The next stage is to think of some possible strategies (***PROPOSED ACTION STRATEGIES***) that will be used with the music idea.

**Mrs. Roache:** Probably these could be:

- 1 . Students sing song while teacher writes word on flipchart.
2. Use words from song to enhance word recognition skills.
3. Use unfamiliar words in sentences.
4. Use phonetic technique to pronounce unfamiliar words.
5. Allow students to compose own songs. Use words of songs for poetry also.
6. Give students opportunity to perform at devotion or school concert.
7. Give students opportunity to document songs for display on Notice Board.
8. Integrate music idea with other subject areas. Example Science ,Social Studies, Mathematics, Religious Education etc.

There are so many things I could do with the music idea. Thank you Mr. Gayle for talking to me.

**Mr. Gayle:** I am glad that you are enjoying the idea but we are not finished. After you have identified the Proposed Action Strategies, the next thing to do is to use a timeline sheet to organize the implementation process.<sup>1</sup>

The timeline will help you to keep track on the progress of work done, Mrs.Roache. Once you have begun the Action Research Process, it is important to keep a Diary. Make a note on EVERY thing that was done and observed. It does not matter how insignificant it may be, once it affects the research, it is important The diary usage will make the next stage much easier that is Reflection and Evaluation.

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### **Box 2.**

#### **Reflective Practitioner Diary Guide (from Kennedy, 2002b)**

***Listed below are some questions that will assist in successful diary entries:***

1. What was the problem?
2. What did I do?
3. Why?
4. Who was involved?
5. What happened?
6. How was it useful?
7. What did I learn?
8. What will I do next?

***Next stage: Start again at 1:***

***Is the problem / question the same or has it changed?***

pic here

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### RESEARCH IN ACTION

By the end of March 2003 a total of 16 JAASP schools (33%) had been involved in the action research process. This included Alderton, Prickly Pole and Mount Providence All Age Schools, who agreed to document existing projects and Village All Age School which worked with a group of Language Arts students from Moneague Teachers College.<sup>1</sup> Since two schools wrote up two projects, this made a total of 18 reports on a range of topics. Some projects involved the whole school, others targeted a small group of students with Special Needs. The number of action researchers involved also differed from school to school. The variety in scope and scale of the projects is indicated in Table 1. A full list of schools involved is found under Appendix B.

**Table 1. Sample Analysis of Action Research Projects**

<b>School</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>For whom</b>	<b>By whom</b>
Fruitful Vale	Parental awareness and attendance	74 targeted truants from all Grades	Principal and all teachers
Waltham	Nutritional meals	All students and teachers	Principal
Alderton	Community Literacy	Community members	Principal and teachers
Mount Hannah	Improving numeracy	Targeted failing students (boys) in all grades	All teachers
Happy Grove	Developing literacy through sports	6 boys in Grade 4	Sports Coordinator
Mount Providence	Involving fathers	Fathers	Principal and teachers
Village	Read Aloud Strategy	14 students in Grade 4	7 Second Year student teachers
Prickly Pole	Literacy development	5 students in Grade 3	Grade 3 teacher

The reports from two projects (Morgan's Pass and Tranquillity All Age Schools) are included below, in order to provide a flavour of the process in action and some of the outcomes. While both schools started out with a similar problem – that of poor motivation, behaviour and achievement – they went about solving the problem in different ways. At Morgan's Pass, the Grade 7-9 teacher (also the school Principal) worked with a small group of boys on co-curricular activities, while at Tranquillity, the teachers from Grades 3 through to 8 worked together to develop more structured strategies to support students' approach to learning within the curriculum. However, both projects had positive outcomes.

For a greater insight into the work as a whole, a selection of case studies is reproduced in Part 2 of this publication: Let the schools speak for themselves!

INSERT MORGAN'S PASS AND TRANQUILLITY HERE

<sup>1</sup> Support and advice for this project was provided by Kevin Walsh, JAASP Technical Advisor for Literacy

## **REFLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

### **Problems and challenges faced in the implementation of Action Research**

Support visits were made to targeted schools in Regions 1, 2, 4,5 & 6. A number of principals had selected the focus area for action research; others were motivated and prompted by the research facilitator. Special mention must be made of Claverty Cottage and Bybrook All Age Schools. Bybrook was totally inaccessible due to landslides in the area for the most part of the Action Research Project. Claverty was eventually reached after much caution through partially cut off winding streamed washed road accentuated with deep cavities on both sides.

The research facilitator encountered difficulty confirming workshop dates for Regions 4, 2 and 1. Original dates conflicted with other JAASP workshops; this resulted in staggered dates to accommodate these regions. In addition, schools in region 1 were inhibited from implementing strategies due to frequent land slippages, which contributed to frequent inaccessibility of the area. The implementation process was further hampered due to the three weeks of incessant rainfall experienced in June 2002. Some of the key areas were flooded and became impassable to students and teachers. These experiences illustrate the reasons why most educational research in Jamaica is usually not carried out in rural schools!

The common agreement, however, was to continue the implementation process in September 2002. Principals and teachers were anticipating positive outcomes. However, approximately 50% of the schools were slow in implementing strategies. Even though the Action Research manuals were issued to schools in September, they were not put to use and were carefully stacked away in filing cabinets or could not be accounted for. Although the mechanism was put in place to complete the projects, this did not operate as planned. When the local consultant was employed for a second phase, to monitor and evaluate the projects, she also found herself having to support implementation.

The participants cited problems such as not having enough time and being involved in too many things at the same time .The Principals expressed the view that JAASP expected too much from them in too short a time. Participants encountered difficulty in acquiring adequate resources to effect the research, both human and non-human, and improvisation had to be made to accomplish their set goals. Some personnel shared the view that the research idea should have been introduced at the inception of the first term. An extended deadline was given.

The research facilitator was instrumental in assisting personnel in identifying problems that exist in their work environment and finding practical solution to alleviate them. Approximately 80% of the targeted schools were able to get action research implemented and have reported success with the level of intervention employed, although some expressed the same sentiments of not being allotted enough time to implement strategies.

Despite these problems, the action research proved to be an inspirational experience for all concerned, suitable for practical classroom use, even in remote rural schools, as evidenced by the written reports and the feedback from participants, which is discussed below.

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However, the experience highlights the need for on-going support during the process for teachers and schools involved, as well as a proper recognition of the resources required.

### Key lessons learnt from action research work carried out

A number of lessons were highlighted by different researchers.

Sometimes the solution to a problem can be quite simple, yet it takes someone who is not directly involved in the problem to make a suggestion to alleviate it. Such was the case of irregular attendance of the targeted students at the Waltham All Age School. According to Mrs. McDonald, they had tried other measures to enhance attendance, but they had all failed, or were short lived. She noted that the Breakfast Programme was successful from its inception. A number of lessons have been learnt from this Action Research:

- There is no one solution to a problem.
- Shared ideas and cooperative planning is more likely to achieve the desired goals.
- Participation is better when everyone is involved in the activity. All students had breakfast because the teachers were having breakfast too.
- The students had something to look forward to each morning and they showed their appreciation by trying to please their teachers.

Finally, *“When there is a problem, one can seek outside assistance”*, says Mrs. McDonald.

However, on the other hand, Ms. Lilleth Luke, Teacher at Prickly Pole All Age, does not necessarily share this view. She stated that the greatest lesson that she learnt is that *“problems can be solved without calling an expert.”*

Mr. Mcleary, Principal of Fruitful Vale All Age expressed the view that *“the entire project demonstrates that if an organization is willing to invest time and manpower in trying to solve issues, positive results can be achieved.”* He further stated that *“Action Research need not be an elaborate exercise. Instead it just needs focused thoughts and willingness to act on statistical findings”*. He concluded that working with others in solving problems or seeing a positive change, does give a rewarding feeling. It does allow the organization to experience a feeling of collective success.

According to Mrs. Cunningham, *“all participant should be assigned roles that will eventually bring about information, emergent leaders, and coordinators.”* She noted that *“a corporate approach to problem solving is key to its solution: as people are given the opportunity to become involved, they can identify with the intent and purpose of the problem and work towards solving it. With that also comes the greatest personal commitment to achieve set goals.”*

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Mr. Bailey, of Morgan's Pass, who implemented strategies to improve academic performance level of a group of underachieving boys, had his share of enrichment experiences .He noted that:

1. Learning difficulties can be caused by one or a combination of problems
2. Students have many problems and these must be addressed to make way for the learning experiences.
3. Parents should play a key role in the resolution of the students' problems.
4. Concerned teachers can make a big difference in helping students to shed some of the social problems affecting learning.
5. Motivated students can perform far beyond their own expectations.
6. Boys like activities and challenges
7. Interest makes learning easier and more enjoyable
8. The earlier the intervention, the fewer problems there will be in later years
9. Parents need regular training and guidance in handling problem children.
10. Teachers can be a part of the problem instead of the solution - even when some teachers see the new interest and achievement levels they refuse to come on board

In reference to the project at Gurney's Mount, which was based on the same ideas as Morgan's Pass, which targeted students' interest in music, craft and sports to enhance literacy and numeracy, Angelia Jarrett stated, "*As students achieved academically their confidence grew and their shyness vanished. Their parents became more supportive and investigated their progress routinely. Hence parents are willing to identify with their children in times of progression*".

Overall, all the researchers who were involved in the process concluded that every child can learn, one therefore has to be patient and seek to identify the strategies that will stimulate learning and use these to the child's advantage. However it was discovered that inadequate resources could hamper the entire progress of interventions.

## **RELATIONSHIP OF ACTION RESEARCH TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING**

Recent legislation aims to raise levels of pupil achievement, in particular through the introduction of new curricula and improved self-management by schools. This requires, as part of a new partnership, strategies for managing development and change to make school more effective. School improvement plans are a means of realizing this goal.

Improvement Planning encourages governors and teachers to answer four basic questions:

- Where is the school now?
- What changes do we need to make?
- How shall we manage these changes overtime?
- How shall we know whether our management of change has been successful?

The purpose of the improvement planning is to help the school to provide practical answers to these questions.

The distinctive feature of an improvement plan is that it brings together, in an overall plan, policies and initiatives, the school's aim and values, its existing achievements and its needs for development. By coordinating aspects of planning, which are otherwise separate, the school acquires a sense of direction and is able to control and manage the tasks of development and change. Priorities for development are planned in detail for one year and are supported by action plans or working documents for staff. The priorities for later years are sketched in outline to provide the longer-term programme.

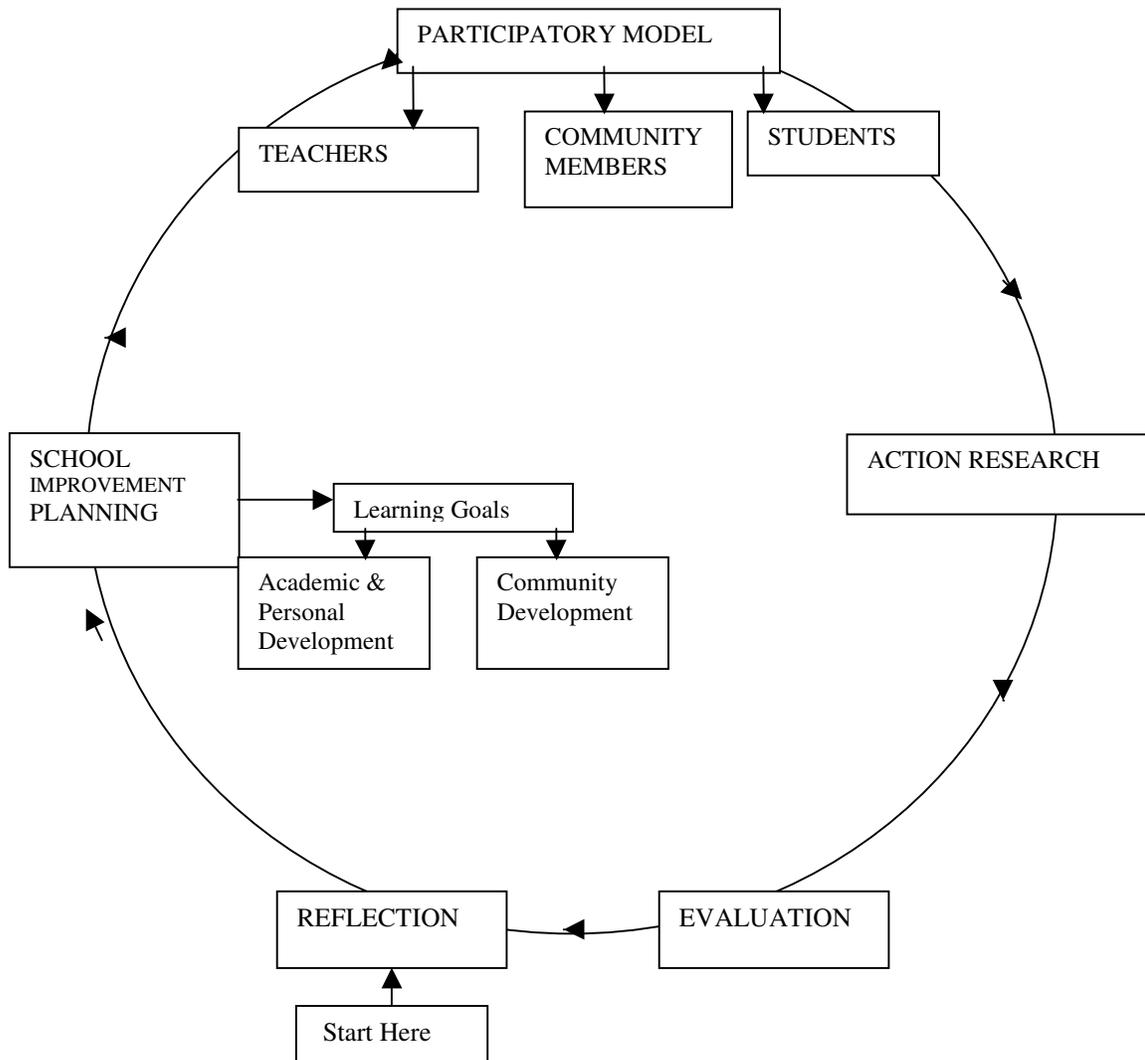
The School Improvement Plan was implemented by JAASP in JAASP schools throughout the six administrative regions. It is a participatory model, involving the setting of learning goals by teachers, community members and students. Learning goals consisted of two main features:

- Children's academic achievement and personal development.
- Community development and involvement in school life.

The learning goals set by the above mentioned personnel were achieved through the implementation of various strategies. Action Research was one of the conduits through which a number of action strategies were achieved. . Hence, a close link can be established between School Improvement Planning and Action Research and this link could be made more explicit in future (see Fig. 3).

Table 2 provides an analysis of how specific learning goals were linked to, and partially achieved through, the use of an Action Research project in a sample of JAASP schools.

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**Fig. 3.**  
**The Relationship between School Improvement Planning and Action Research**

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SCHOOLS	LEARNING GOALS IN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN	ACTION STRATEGIES
Prickly Pole A/A	Increase literacy from 50% to 75% in all grades by the end of 2003	Develop remedial programmes for special needs students
Waltham A/A	Provide nutritious meals for students & teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Start breakfast programme.</i></li> <li>• Diversify kitchen garden and poultry project.</li> <li>• Acquire water tanker &amp; feeder.</li> </ul>
Mt.Hannah A/A	To improve numeracy levels from 50% to 70% by year 2003.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve teaching competencies.</li> <li>• Regular tests &amp; quizzes.</li> <li>• Provide equipment and material.</li> <li>• Math's Club</li> </ul>
Tranquility A/A	By September 2002 an average of 80% of all pupil doing the NAP tests will achieve Near/Mastery.	Homework programme and parental guidance, including community volunteers help.
Mt. Providence A/A	All students should show a positive attitude towards learning and attendance, self esteem and respect by year 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Working with parents</i></li> <li>• Activity base learning</li> <li>• Clubs</li> <li>• <i>Identify role models in community.</i></li> </ul>
Morgan's Pass A/A	Grades 6-9 result will improve in all subject areas From 63% to Year 1 68% Year 2 75% Year 3 85%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>More effective ways of teaching.</i></li> <li>• Books.VCR, computer</li> <li>• More supervision of instruction and implementation of curriculum.</li> <li>• <i>Sports</i></li> </ul>

**Table 2. Learning Goals and Action Strategies related to Action Research**

### IMPACT OF THE ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS

When one encounters a challenge, there are basically two options that one can take:

1. Run – that is, ignore or pretend that the problem does not exist or accept that there can be no change.
2. Attack - that is, embark on the situation using all the necessary resources available to “bring it down”.

With the former option, the problem will remain the same and will consistently stare one in the face, making life miserable, and thus it contributes to lack of fulfillment and achievement.

The latter, however, will require patience, hard work, perseverance and stress, but the end product in most cases spells success. This experience will enhance self-esteem and self worth, it gives one a sense of purpose and reminds one that there is nothing too difficult for one to achieve.

We can relate the above-mentioned situation to the implementation of an Action Research Project in schools where already the workload is extremely strenuous to the stakeholders and where it seems time rarely permits one to practice outside of the formal curricular activities unless much sacrifice is made. It, seems, therefore, that Action Research may mean sacrificing time spent on self and family and literally devoting it to the cause of the profession chosen for the sake of the community and the students that are placed in one's care.

Of all the Action Research Projects implemented, a major ninety percent (90%) centered on literacy and numeracy development among students in rural All Age Schools. These students were labeled underachievers or “dunces”. The truth of the matter was that these students had problems that inhibited their progress in learning. These had to be addressed either by the school, parents or community, if any meaningful development was to take place.

The other ten percent (10%) focused on the development of the community through adult education; income-generation projects; parental involvement in school life through the development of a Father's Club; and the implementation of breakfast and lunch programmes to boost punctuality and attendance. However, even though these were so named, the end results have important bearing on the development of literacy and numeracy in the schools as well as in the community. Let's see how.

If students are properly fed, then it is highly likely that attendance and punctuality will improve, thus increasing their capabilities to be more focused at school. This leads to Improvements in literacy and numeracy levels as was the case at Waltham All Age and Fruitful Vale All Age Schools.

It was noted that targeted students along with the school benefited from the programme in many ways. The following were some of the benefits:

- i. Attendance improved throughout the week especially on Friday. Friday was now seen and treated as a normal school day.
- ii. The problem of late coming has become history
- iii. Students who were not hungry were able to pay more attention to work

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- iv. Curriculum delivery increased-better participation from students
- v. Less disruption and aggression from students
- vi. Parental interest and participation increased
- vii. Direct and indirect lessons in meal preparation, menu and recipe planning were taught to the students.

It can be concluded that with cooperative staff it is not a difficult task to implement problem-solving techniques *within the day-to-day operation of the school*. Hence, all stakeholders need to dialogue and implement strategies to assist our children, so that the desired goals can be achieved.

One can attest to the fact that the school is really a system with many sub-units working together to achieve the same goal. It is evident, therefore, that if one unit does not cooperate then it is highly possible that the desired results will not be achieved. Each unit has its specific role. This was the case with the Mt. Providence scenario. The absence of fathers in school life of children impacted negatively on academic and social performance of children. As soon as strategies were implemented to address this situation the pieces of the 'jigsaw puzzle' came together. Fathers became more involved in their children's life, the performance of boys improved, fathers now serve as role model to boys, they became resource personnel to the school in the form of sports coordinators and agricultural assistance. Their input had important bearing on what goes on in the school.

This situation relates to the argument put forward by Mrs. Miller, Senior Teacher of Clapham All Age School. She postulated that, "*It is only when there is cooperation between school and its community that there can be real progress in school.*" She further states that, "*with cooperative efforts of students, teachers, community and education planners, children can become literate and reading disabilities can be reduced.*"

Mrs. Cunningham perceived the same outcome as she embarked on a learning center to address the literacy levels of parents. It was reported that as they became involved there was a sense of comrade as together they searched for information giving them a sense of worth as they work towards achieving the goals of the school.

Those schools that implemented strategies to address the literacy and numeracy development of students also reported that, as the students excelled, the parents came aboard wanting to find out what has contributed to the miracle and supported both their children and the school. It is now being echoed that *an empowered teacher is a reflective decision maker* who finds joy in learning and in investigating the teaching/ learning process - one who views learning as construction and teaching as a facilitating process to enhance development. This development can only be enriched if strategies are implemented to maximize on parental involvement in school life.

From the point of view of the students, experimentation with various strategies, especially the integration of issues that are of interest to them, has been shown to be effective. Integration of ideas helps to conceptualize information as a whole. Students need to be shown how to make the transition from one situation to another and be cognizant of the relationships between situations. These characteristics were identified in the Morgan's Pass, Happy Grove and Nightingale Grove projects. It was reported that students improved on their all-round performance. They experienced a growth spurt in math, reading, singing, poetry, science, social, studies and communication tasks. There

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was improvement in self-esteem, skill development, cooperative learning, overall a dramatic development. Students felt they were very special. The progress of these students stimulated interest in the entire school population. The homes were healed as parent/ child/ teacher relationships improved. Parents became proud, more caring and interested in students. The message was sent throughout the community. Other schools became interested and a cluster relationship was developed to foster the dissemination of ideas.

Action Research has helped to bridge the gap between school and community. With this linkage our children will benefit immensely academically and socially.

### **Impact of Action Research at Village All Age School**

“At the end of the Action Research performed by a group of seven students from the Moneague College Yr 2 Literacy Department, the researchers can say that it has not only been successful but informative as well.

The research was challenging but at the end of seven weeks we can say the challenge experienced was worthwhile. It is evident in the post-test that the majority of our students have improved or experienced some form of growth. On our last visit, the Principal told us of the changes that are being experienced by parents, class teacher and students. some of these changes are:

1. Students are becoming more excited about reading
2. Every child wants to Read Aloud and share books
3. Parents are excited about the programme, as they have seen the vast improvement in their children where reading is concerned.
4. Children who do not usually read at home are asking for books
5. Children who usually ask for toys are requesting books from parents.

After listening to these comments the group of seven were very overwhelmed, as we had touched fourteen lives and been an inspiration to them. The students were motivated to read and the outcome is that reading is already becoming a part of them.

The Principal requested that we come back at least once a month to have Read Aloud sessions with them.”

**Marche-Gay Campbell, Kadian Cole, Carleen Fletcher, Kimbiley McLeish, Mario Palmer, Cecelia Robinson, Keisha Taylor, May 2002**

### CONCLUSION

The Action Research aspect of the JAASP has been a success. Although the process had to be executed over a relatively short period of time, much was achieved.

A number of discoveries have been made. Most importantly, students who had relatively low self-esteem experienced a growth spurt, thus giving a feeling of self worth. Those who were termed underachievers have proven that all that was needed was someone to extend a caring arm, employing relevant developmental strategies to remedy their deficiencies and with a willingness to sacrifice quality time for a worthy cause.

Significantly, teachers, principals and other students alike who were not directly involved in the process shared the joy that came with the immense achievement that was experienced by the targeted group, as they displayed a more positive outlook to life and developed hope for the future.

Expectedly, some parents suddenly came to the realization that they too were needed in the lives of their children. It was realized that parents impacted on their children's achievement in many ways, both negatively and positively. Parental contributions have an important bearing on children's educational and social success.

Probably the government of Jamaica could institute a culture of Action Research in several Garrison Communities to effect similar positive changes. It was reported that, as a result of the implementation of Action Research in certain schools, homes and communities were healed as cluster links were developed. Everyone wanted to be identified with the schools or children who were achieving, since this spells hope and success for other children who experience similar difficulties to those once experienced by these "New Achievers".

The sentiment is expressed that if all stakeholders implement a culture of research in schools, it is highly possible that the number of underachievers will be drastically reduced. This will eventually contribute to a more educated society and assist in the reduction of anti-social behaviour and crime.

Action Research is a practitioner's tool, which is used to improve one's practice. Reflective practitioners working together can maximize on educational development and help to bring about social change. Several schools have expressed the intention of continuing to apply this method beyond the duration of JAASP. Let's hope that Action Research is here to stay in remote rural schools.

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**APPENDIX A**

**ACTION RESEARCH TIMELINE**

The following form can be used to keep track of the research process

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Objectives / Action Strategies</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Week/Date</b>	<b>Person(s) responsible</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Resources Human / Non Human</b>
<b>1</b>						
<b>2</b>						
<b>3</b>						
<b>4</b>						

**Action Research Timeline (from Kennedy, 2002a)**

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### APPENDIX B

#### JAASP SCHOOLS INVOLVED IN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS

Schools that completed and submitted projects

Region	Schools
1	
2	Fruitful Vale A/A, Tranquility A/A, Bybrook Primary
3	Prickly Pole A/A, Waltham A/A, Alderton All Age, Moneague College / Village A/A
4	Gurney's Mt. All Age (2) Mt.Hannah
5	Clapham A/A, Nightingale A/A, Happy Grove All Age
6	Morgan's Pass A/A (2) Mt.Liberty A/A, Simon A/A, Mt. Providence A/A

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**PART TWO**

**CASE STUDIES: RESEARCH IN ACTION**