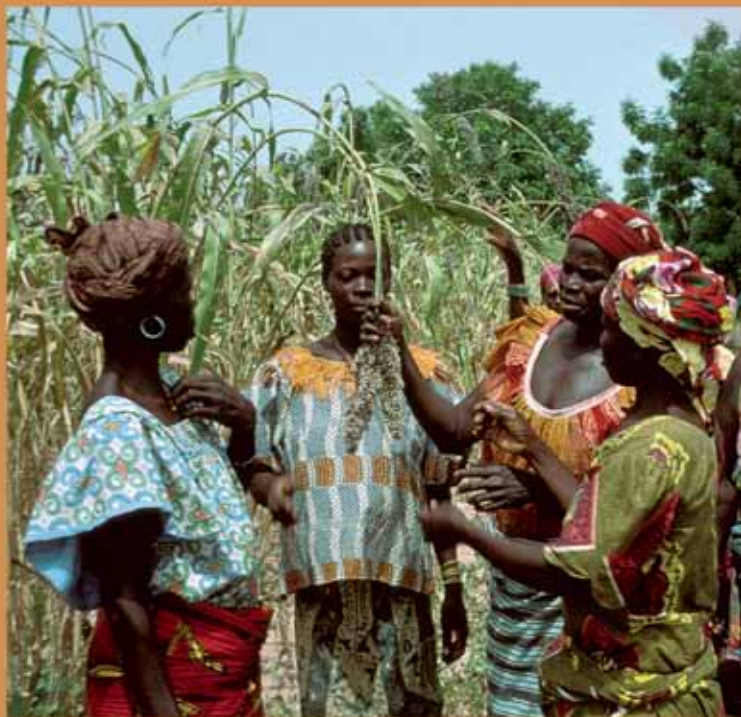




Innovating with rural stakeholders in the developing world

Action research in partnership

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14. Training for action research partnership: strategies, content and modalities

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This chapter is meant especially for the professional researcher or technician, proponent of an ARP being launched, who is responsible for training the members of its collective.

Perhaps this individual has already read some reference texts on ARP or has participated in ad hoc training sessions on the topic. He or she may have been involved in the past in implementing projects using an approach similar to that of ARP. In any case, this person has to be able to answer this question: How to design and implement an effective training strategy in ARP for the members of its collective?

To help the person think about and answer this question, this chapter suggests specific points to be considered by outlining general training strategies – and also specific ones for initial and ongoing training – and by covering various pedagogical modalities.

General training strategy

▮ Initial training and ongoing training

Any training activity for ARP is only meaningful when it is part of an overall approach for improving the ARP collective's effectiveness in pursuit of its objectives. It has to be part of a strategy that the collective will define at the very start, subject, of course, to mid-stream corrections.

The overall training plan will follow a coherent thread throughout the project's life; it will not be limited to a simple sequence of piecemeal training sessions or activities. As an example, Figure 8 shows the organization of an overall training plan for an ARP project spanning several years.

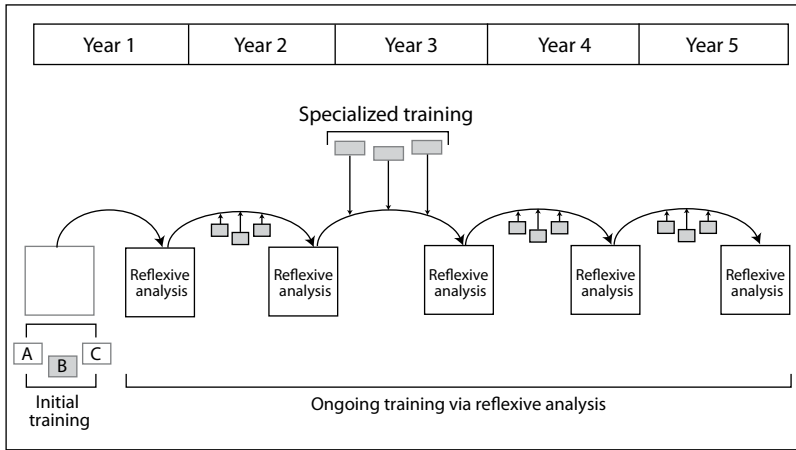


Figure 8. Example of the structure of a training plan for an action research in partnership (ARP) project.

Depending on specific cases, other training arrangements are, of course, possible. In the case shown in Figure 8, the ARP project starts with initial training modules. It then incorporates a regular sequence of training sessions, corresponding to the ARP’s cycles and based on reflexive analysis.

Specialized training activities are included between these collective milestone sessions to attain the goals set by the ARP collective and which, indirectly, will enrich the reflexive sessions.

Whatever the structure adopted for them, the training activities eventually decided upon take place in a non-linear, interactive manner.

The initial training can take one of several different forms. For example, we can organize intensive workshops spanning several days. They can be meant for all the members of the ARP collective (workshops A and C in Figure 8), or for a subset of them (workshop B), for example, only for researchers, farmers, or technicians, for in-depth training on topics that concern only them (see as an example, in Chapter 7, the experience of the Unai project in Brazil with its series of workshops spread out over 18 months).

Other standalone training activities or modalities designed or identified during the course of the project and deemed pertinent by the collective will be inserted into this first series of workshops. Let us not forget that the ARP project can also send a representative to attend training sessions thought useful by the collective but which are



external to the project. In such a case, some thought will have to be given to choosing the “right” representative to send and the contract the project should enter into with this person. Such a contract will formalize not only how this person will present the project at the external training session but also the way he or she will report both its content and form after the training.

▮ Operational decisions in organizing a training

The formulation and adoption of a strategic training plan facilitates the taking of operational decisions. As a rough guide, we provide here some of the points to keep in mind and some criteria for guiding the corresponding decisions.

Selecting participants

The selection of participants depends on the shape of the partnership, the role each participant is expected to play, their profiles, and their level of involvement in the collective.

Where to train?

The points to consider in choosing a location for the training are:

- Selecting locations where the participants will feel comfortable, which will create links between the various participants (for example, alternating between open-air locations and indoor classrooms), which offer catering facilities, the possibility of having several different groups working parallel to each other, and the possibility of using flipcharts;
- At the same time, avoiding locations that are found, via a prior scouting, to be unsuitable (for example, when it is not possible to use a projector, a location that is too noisy, etc.) or that may make one or more types of participants uncomfortable, for example, university amphitheatres which may induce feelings of inferiority in farmers or meetings rooms with a podium more suitable for a lecture than for an active participation among equals;
- Let various partner institutions host the training session in turns to give each of them an opportunity to appropriate the training approach;
- With a little imagination, flexibility, and opportunism, every location can be used for training purposes as long as it has – or there can be created – some minimal suitable conditions. A bus trip, a restaurant room, or the shade of a tree can be found to be suitable locations because that is where the “training” happens to be take place.



When to train?

Finding time for training depends, of course, on the limitations and the availability of participants. Major factors here are the agricultural seasons and calendars, determining factors for the work schedules of the farmers, technicians, and researchers. Training schedules depend also, of course, on the dynamics of the ARP's cycles and calendar.

It may also be worthwhile when using some training aids, such as farmers' fields or agronomic trials, to consider the possibility of subsequent rapid application of the knowledge or skills acquired during the training before they fade with time.

Combining training modes

Depending on particular participants' requirements, we can combine various training modalities: degree-based and/or professional training, very short term or over a long period, with short or long individual sessions, specific or broad-based, alternating, etc.

Choosing trainers

Trainers should be identified based on their area of expertise and in accordance with the results expected to be achieved through training. In the launch phase, it may be advisable to call on "external" trainers, with recognized ARP skills and knowledge, to clarify concepts and principles and to illustrate their application by various real-world examples.

In the implementation phase, there is a shift towards reliance on skills identified within the ARP collective for conducting specific training, for example, on the use and mastery of a particular tool.

Formalizing the training capacity within the collective

To avoid having to take ad hoc decisions, the ARP collective can, in some cases, constitute an internal education/training committee. This committee would then be in charge of implementing the training plan over the duration of the project and would work towards developing in-house training self-sufficiency.

In this way, the members can gradually become trainers in their own right, capable of conducting "routine" training activities. Specialized or strategic themes would, for their part, be left to external trainers, a costly but indispensable necessity.



Formation of such a committee is particularly justified in projects of a certain size, involving a large number of partners, or of a lengthy duration. For such projects, training activities are an important issue and involve considerable effort.

It seems pertinent to note that these operational decisions, though of minor importance at first sight, are never insignificant. Depending on the way they are taken, they contribute to a greater or lesser degree to the collective's cohesiveness, to its effectiveness, and, finally, to the ARP's objectives (see Part 2).

Pedagogical approach

All ARP training activities, initial or ongoing, are a form of adult education, requiring skills specific to that domain. Without going into the details, we focus on three essential points: defining a suitable pedagogical scheme, respecting the three key moments in any training activity, and documenting the training and its process.

▮ Suitable pedagogy

The concept of suitable pedagogy refers to the adult education strategy of involving the persons “undergoing training” as much as possible. Various modalities can be planned, in particular individual or group work, presentations, discussions or debates in plenary session, exercises in analyzing an existing situation or in coming up with a new one, foresight and simulation, presentations in conventional or novel form (theater, sociodrama, art, etc.) and/or in informal and convivial settings (around a meal, discussions during outings, etc.).

When the ARP collective does not have the requisite skills itself, it should mobilize persons whose profession is adult education and who have experience in developing training sessions for varied audiences.

To ensure that the training is compatible with an ARP approach and conforms to its principles (see Part 1), we should take heed of the following:

- Joint construction with the participants of, or at least discussions with them on, the contents and form of the training. The initial issues that requires agreement are often the flexibility of the schedule and the continuous fine-tuning of the activities. The aim should always be to optimize these encounters so that they become true opportunities for cross-learning between participants with varied skills;



- Use of pedagogical modalities that optimize interactions and allow expression of the key ARP values, including the ethical ones;
- Managing a training often destined for a heterogeneous audience (a given for any ARP collective). This raises logistical and pedagogical challenges, for example, in finding ways for participants to understand and talk to each other, in defining the minimum level of comprehension of concepts to aim for, and in identifying modalities which will sustain the interest of such an assorted public.

Box 24 illustrates the diversity of the audience and the various expectations of an ARP collective's members that may be encountered.

As far as pedagogical modalities are concerned, it may seem superfluous to mention the benefits of using a computer to project images and text. Used to good effect, the computer is an unequalled tool for presenting results of group work, of synthetic reports, of explanatory diagrams and drawings, as well as for discussing ideas and giving shape to them. It holds everyone's attention and allows them to work simultaneously.

That said, the computer can also act as a hindrance to collective work since it is a communications tool that is difficult to master. And often what it projects take precedence over the participation of all attendees.

▮ Organizing training: three key stages

Any training activity becomes more effective if it is conceived as a three-stage process: before, during, and after – similar to the organization of meetings and exchange visits (see Chapter 10, “Managing collectives,” page 133).

Very often, the organizers focus most of their effort on only the “during.” The “before” is, for them, only for logistical arrangements, and the “after” only draws cursory interest.

Experience has, however, shown time and time again that the “before” is of strategic importance. It is then that thought must be given to inserting the training into the ARP project and approach, and to the ways it can help strengthen the ARP collective. It is also the time to consider the relationships between external contributions on the one hand, and the participants' experience, professional background, skills and knowledge, on the other. It is also the time to think about the desired goals.



Box 24. Diversity of personal profiles that an ARP training has to accommodate

The target audience of an ARP training is diverse and has varied expectations of it. For example:

- The “beginner” who knows nothing and who wants an “ARP for dummies” type of training;
- The practitioner of development-research activities who wants to move towards ARP;
- The member of an ARP project, who wants to capitalize on the approach’s results and wants to write scientific articles, or who wants to fill some gaps in his or her knowledge, for example, to be able to communicate better with partners in the ARP collective and be more effective in teamwork;
- The farmers’ representative who wants to be able to discuss and negotiate with scientists and engineers;
- The technician who interfaces between a farmer organization and a plant breeder-researcher. In spite of considerable experience in managing groups and leading teams, this person dreads any writing task (including that of a simple invitation to a meeting!) and wants to learn something about plant physiology so that he or she can interact with researchers on a better footing;
- The plant breeder, competent and much in demand by the farmers, who love to talk to them, but is not capable of organizing and managing a meeting;
- The young graduate who learnt about participatory approaches during her studies but who, now employed to assist an ARP project, fears she may not be up to it.

Also, it is then that we start discussing the questions that will guide the training as it progresses. As Confucius said, “I do not want to know the answer; I want to know the question.”

The “before” is the time to establish the terms of reference and to clarify the demand and supply. Some training plans never take off, not because of lack of funding but because a true demand is lacking. It is also at this time that the future participants respond to requests by the trainer (for example, writing down their professional experiences, and reading reference texts). This way, they arrive “prepared” at the training session and with a willingness to learn and question.

The “during” has already been covered. It may be added that an attempt should be made whenever possible to involve participants, to encourage them to ask questions such as “How can we...?” And rather than provide readymade solutions and suggestions – which, however



relevant, are often ignored – an effort must be made to guide them and assist them in finding their own solutions.

As an illustrative example, Box 25 describes a training workshop organized in Brazil (see Chapter 7, “Introducing action research rooted in partnership: the Unai project in Brazil,” page 97).

Box 25. Role of participants in a diagnosis within the Unai project in Brazil

Using a training-and-reflection framework, research teams of the Unai project wanted to improve the effectiveness of using thematic focus groups in the project. To do this, they had to first study and diagnose these focus groups’ current functioning.

In a conventional training scheme, trainers would have prepared a form to characterize the different focus groups concerned and would have asked participants to fill it in. In this case, with training conducted in the framework of an ARP approach, trainers chose to ask the participants themselves to define the criteria for constructing the form, and only then to fill it in.

In addition, they asked participants to work in groups by type of stakeholder – researchers, technicians, and farmer representatives – with each group doing the same task.

The plenary session was witness to a rich and varied discussion, not only on the choice of criteria by the various teams but also on their relative classifications of the focus groups.

Finally, the “after” of a training period is also strategically important. Even though assessing the suitability and effectiveness of the skills imparted in relation to the stated goals and the identification of any additional training to conduct or themes to cover may be useful, the focus should not be on evaluating the training as a standalone activity.

What *is* important about the “after” is, above all, to convert the training into an action plan: How to insert the skills acquired and knowledge gained during the training into each participant’s professional practice? In fact, some ARP trainers start constructing the pedagogical plan by outlining the “after,” i.e., the action plan.

▮ Suitable documentation

Suitable and speedy documentation of the training activities is useful. To begin with, it allows participants to recall what they have discovered, learnt, and constructed. Moreover, such capitalization of the exchange of experiences and learning can be referred to whenever needed, for example, at the time of inducting new members into



the ARP collective, during the period for monitoring and evaluating activities and ARP cycles (see Part 4), or during periods set aside for reflexivity.

The documentation itself can take several forms, ranging from conventional summary reports to more original ones: audiovisual report, oral accounts, or posters.

Even though the organizers usually take responsibility for documenting the training activities, it may be useful to also ask participants to produce their own reports of what they have learnt. This reciprocal assessment of what was accomplished contributes to a greater responsibility for and appropriation of the subject matter by the participants.

Structuring the initial training

Organized at the start of the ARP approach, the initial training covers general ARP principles. On the one hand, it helps participants find out what makes an ARP, to learn its concepts, approaches, and methods, and helps prepare them to implement it. On the other hand, it harmonizes the information that participants have and creates a common frame of reference.

While acknowledging that there is no standard content for training in ARP, we can mention some topics that have to be covered if the training is to be solid and methodological. Table 3 lists them in no particular order of importance. It should come as no surprise that most of these points relate to topics covered in the previous chapters.

Two contrasting pedagogical directions can be taken in introducing the topic of ARP during the initial training depending on whether the focus is on breaking old paradigms or on adding to or building on knowledge already acquired by the participants.

In the first case, ARP is immediately and unequivocally presented as a special modality for transforming real lives and for knowledge production. From the first, participants are introduced to an approach very different from what they are used to and which challenges them.

In such a scheme, rather than systematically contrast the ARP approach with the participants' experiences, we focus on the concept of the values that underlie the approach, such as autonomy and shared responsibility, equality and respect for all identities, solidarity, and the clash of ideas and practices.



Table 3. Fundamental topics to cover in an initial training in action research in partnership (ARP)

-
1. Identification and appraisal of the existing skills of the participants that will be useful in the ARP via analysis of existing practices and the participants' experience with teamwork, in innovation development, and in participatory approaches, etc.

 2. Principles and basic concepts of the ARP:
 - Origin and definition
 - Ethical aspects, and attitudes and values that underlie the ARP
 - ARP stages and cycles, general aspects of the process of innovation
 - Governance of an ARP, ARP set-ups, steering, and monitoring and evaluation
 - An ARP's results
 - Principles for negotiation between stakeholders, and for co-construction
 - Reflexivity
 - Power relationships, asymmetries between stakeholders, imparting autonomy

 3. Involvement of different stakeholders (farmers, farmer organizations, researchers, etc.) in ARP set-ups and its specifics

 4. Joint planning of a cycle or standalone activities

 5. Collegial experimentation: planning, implementation, evaluation, systemization

 6. Managing communications in an AR

 7. Participatory methods, techniques, and tools, in particular:
 - Participatory diagnosis
 - Organization and facilitation of meetings, workshops, and exchange days and visits
 - Training and functioning of farmers' groups
 - Modalities for negotiation, management, and conflict resolution
 - Undertaking reflexivity
-

This pedagogical modality, perhaps unsettling to the participants, is especially suitable when they have already developed a strong desire to be part of an ARP.

The second scheme relies on the participants' experiences, their educational and professional backgrounds, and their concerns. It helps them in their quest for a new way of functioning and for establishing relationships with other stakeholders for solving the problems confronting them, just like the ARP proposes.

The prior appraisal of the participants' skills, background, and experiences (see point 1, Table 3) pinpoints with accuracy what is known and



what is not. In this way, topics to be covered – and the order in which they should be – are identified. In this scheme, including a field visit within the context of an existing initiative becomes a cornerstone of the training. This modality has the advantage of being reassuring to the participants but requires the ability to compare the ARP to the participants' past experiences.

Box 26 shows how these two modalities were implemented in two initial-training workshops, one organized in Mali in October 2006, the other in Guinea in February 2008 (Triomphe *et al.*, 2009). As can be seen, both modalities can also be combined during a single workshop.

Many ARP collectives seem to prefer a high-density initial training, of short duration, such as a workshop of a few days for some twenty participants.

However, other forms of initial training may be more suitable in some situations or particular configurations of the ARP collective: for example, regular study circles or remote learning via the Internet.

Structuring ongoing training

The initial training in ARP plays an essential role in sharing key concepts and helping develop a collective dynamic. Nevertheless, it cannot fulfill all the training requirements of implementing an ARP. New training needs often arise during the project, mainly depending on results obtained (see Figure 8 and Part 2).

Box 26. Two examples of initial training in action research in partnership

Two workshops, one in Mali in October 2006, the other in Guinea in February 2008, had the same overall objective: introducing ARP concepts and preparing their implementation in innovation projects with the stakeholders. Both were destined for the same type of audience: researchers and representatives of development projects and farmer associations. All participants had had at least some experience with “participatory research.” The participants belonged to teams involved in development-research projects. Each workshop’s program had been decided upon by an organizing committee consisting of representatives of national project teams and ARP specialists from outside the countries concerned.

The two programs proposed a succession of stages each corresponding to one or more sessions, ranging in duration from a half a day to a day and a half.

...



Périod	Mali Scheme 1: breaking with the old	Guinée Scheme 2: Valorizing and building on acquired knowledge
Stage 0	Introduction of the participants, presentation of their expectations, the goals of the workshop; definition of important terms: innovation, partnership, etc.	
Stage 1	Presentation of the ARP as a suitable modality for bringing about changes and discussions – Presentation of the four development-research projects of the participants	Appraisal of participatory research conducted by the participants, examples of novel approaches – Reading and analysis of ARP texts
Stage 2	Presentation on implementing an ARP and discussions – Presentation on implementation aspects in the four projects	Major principles of an ARP – ARP’s contribution to solving problems identified during the appraisal in stage 1
Stage 3	Presentations on steering and guiding in the four projects – Presentation on steering an ARP and discussions	Field visits to compare concepts and practices (preparation, conduct, appraisal)
Stage 4	Presentation on evaluation in the four projects and discussions – Presentation on evaluation as an important aspect of an ARP and discussions	Presentation and enriching of the four Guinean research projects on the basis of discussions of the previous few days
Stage 5	Various additional concepts, based on participants’ questions – Presentation of diverse experiences with participatory approaches	Planning for the subsequent year for each project, by insisting on the taking into account in the project activities of ARP aspects and principles discussed in the training and judged especially useful
Stage 6	Summary, evaluation, and future stages	

▮ General and specific training requirements

Of course, one can take a chance and hope to manage without having to organize training for every conceivable topic related to the ARP. However, the previous chapters have shown the importance of offering



training on several topics that are essential to an ARP's success. These include:

- Conflict management;
- Managing financial compensations in the functioning of organizational mechanisms;
- Ethics and ARP values;
- Leading and managing debates;
- Construction of a common language;
- Construction of a dialog;
- Training in maieutics;
- Identifying cause-and-effect relationships;
- “Failure” analysis;
- Communications tools and methods;
- Elementary knowledge, most notably in basic mathematics because, for example, the units the farmers use to measure surface areas, volumes, and time are not the same that technicians use, maybe not even the same as used by other farmer communities.

This list is not exhaustive and includes topics already suggested for the initial training, with the significant difference that in an ongoing training it is the topics arising while implementing the ARP that are central to the training and reflexivity.

Training unrelated directly to ARP can also find a place in an ARP approach. We can thus be confronted, like in any project, by requirements for training in subjects such as:

- Use of specific tools such as databases, geographic information systems, or modeling systems;
- Design and implementation of operational set-ups;
- Negotiation of test and experimentation protocols combining tests in controlled conditions and tests conducted by a network of farmers;
- Last but not least, knowledge and skills relating to the technical domain of the problem at hand, for example, varietal selection, management of irrigated systems, design of new cropping systems, livestock feeding, commercialization of produce, “whole-farm” advice, or access to credit.

These points are beyond the scope of this book on the ARP approach and will not be covered here. It is worth emphasizing that a lack of mastery or technical skills in a particular area on the part of the ARP collective can compromise the quality of results – and its legitimacy in the eyes of some stakeholders – and can thus impact the success of the ARP approach.



▮ Use of reflexivity as a learning modality

Apart from training in the themes mentioned above, one of the most fundamental needs – but one most difficult to fulfill – is training in reflexivity on the collective's practices, i.e., in self-analysis during the course of the ARP. For more details on how this can be done, refer to work done by Verspieren at University of Lille, France (<http://cueep.univ-lille1.fr/transformations>, in French), or that of Robo (<http://probo.free.fr/>, in French).

For an ARP approach to succeed, it is not enough to know the reference concepts, to put organizational set-ups in place, and to master the tools used. Of course, learning while doing is in itself very effective and the errors committed are a fertile source of learning. But the learning does not necessarily happen spontaneously.

Organized reflexive analysis is conducive to individual and collective learning and facilitates reflection reflecting on process governance (see Chapter 8, page 107). This analysis is structured around the question, “What makes it work, what does not?”

The analysis is based on comparing the results obtained with the stated objectives. It leads to a re-examination and reworking of the initial questions and hypotheses. It also examines the way ARP activities are conducted and the lessons the collective learns from them.

More than the reasons for simple success or failure, it is an investigation of why an activity succeeds in one village or with one group of partners but not in another that is the key to reproducing the observed success, to avoiding future failures, to extrapolating the success, and even to changing its scale. This investigation requires detailed description of the activities carried out and professional situations that are causing problems. It also requires an analysis on the basis of hypotheses about the causes. The temptation to offer quick advice or recommendations needs to be avoided.

The ability of an ARP collective to conduct a meaningful reflexive analysis depends partly on its ability to put into practice the principles and attitudes listed in Box 27 – whose usefulness, of course, extends far beyond their contribution to reflexivity.

**Box 27. Key principles and attitudes for conducting reflexivity**

- Being able to listen to and respect others
- Being able to “read,” including between the lines when the participants are well-read
- Being able to “write” or being able to call on those who can
- Being able to challenge oneself
- Being always willing to progress
- Being able to put oneself in others’ shoes
- Being able to report back results and findings
- Being able to step aside and let others step up
- Trying to know oneself and the others, one’s and their strengths and assets, limitations and gray areas.

Reflexivity ought not to be limited to a summary analysis at the end of a year, of a project cycle, or of an agricultural season. It can be beneficially undertaken at the end of any short-duration activity, at the end of a working meeting of two hours, for example, with the participants asking themselves what transpired during the session or activity and what they have learnt about their way of working.

Without making it into a routine – which would cause it to lose all meaning – sessions can therefore be organized to analyze the processes of several activities. All the people involved in an ARP process must conduct these analyses; they must not become the prerogative of only one type of stakeholder, usually that of the researchers.