

How is Action Research Defined?

Action research is a form of investigation designed for use by teachers to attempt to solve problems and improve professional practices in their own classrooms. It involves systematic observations and data collection which can be then used by the practitioner-researcher in reflection, decision-making and the development of more effective classroom strategies.

- Parsons and Brown (2002)

Action Research is a fancy way of saying let's study what's happening at our school and decide how to make it a better place.

- Emily Calhoun (1994)

Action research is a natural part of teaching. Teachers are continually observing students, collecting data and changing practices to improve student learning and the classroom and school environment. Action research provides a framework that guides the energies of teachers toward a better understanding of why, when, and how students become better learners.

- A. Christine Miller (2007)

Five Phases of Action Research

1. Selecting an area or focus
 - Identifying an area of interest
 - Focus on students
 - Look at both immediate and cumulative effects
2. Collecting data
 - Collect existing archival data
 - Use additional multiple data sources
 - Collect data regularly
 - Promote collective ownership of data
 - Monitor data collection
3. Organizing data
 - Count instances, events, and artifacts
 - Display data in tables and charts
 - Arrange data by classroom, grade level, and school
 - Organize for analysis
4. Analyzing and interpreting data
 - Analyze and question the data as a professional collective
 - Decide what can be celebrated and what needs attention
 - Determine priority area(s) for action
- 4.5 Studying the professional literature
 - Identify professional literature that relates to or matches the interest
 - Gather research reports, research syntheses, articles, videotapes, etc.
 - Analyze and interpret these materials for understanding and action
 - Determine the most promising actions

5. Taking action

- Combine data analysis with that from professional literature
- Select best options for action
- Craft short- and long-term action plans
- Implement some actions immediately
- Assess implementation of selected actions

“Rinse and Repeat” (using action research to assess effects)

SELECTED questions to ask in the context of Action Research:

1. Why am I collecting this data?
 - How is the data related to the study question?
 - What will the data tell us about students’ learning and teaching strategies?
2. What exactly am I collecting?
 - What kind of data will give me the best information about students learning and teaching strategies?
 - How can I gather data on the same question in different ways, from different sources, and at different times (triangulation).
3. Where am I going to collect it?
 - What kind of a sample is needed?
 - Do I need to identify the student for long-term tracking?
4. When am I going to collect it and for how long?
 - How much data is needed?
 - How periodic should the collection be?
5. Who is going to collect it?
 - Is data being collected by myself or will others be involved?
6. How will data be collected, analyzed and findings shared?
 - Has a time line been established?
 - Where and how will the data be stored?
 - Has the criterion for analyzing the data (rubrics, implementation logs) been established before the data is collected?
 - What approach will be used for recording, displaying, and sharing findings?

Bibliography:

- Miller, Christine A. “Action Research: Making Sense of Data.” On-line article recovered 11/05/2007, www.coe.fau.edu/sfcel/sensdata.htm.
- Calhoun, Emily F. “How to Use Action Research in the Self-Renewing School.” Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1994.
- Parsons, Rick D., and Kimberlee S. Brown. *Teacher as Reflective Practitioner and Action Researcher*. Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2002.