

Action Research: Building Powerful Learning Communities

From the presentation by **Cathy Caro-Bruce** on April 19, 2004
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What is Action Research?

Action Research is a process through which teachers collaborate in evaluating their practice jointly...raise awareness of their personal theory...articulate a shared conception of values...try out new strategies to render the values expressed in their practice more consistent with the educational values they espouse...record their work in a form that is readily available to and understandable by other teachers...and thus develop a shared theory of teaching by researching practice.

John Elliott. (1991). Action Research for Educational Change. Philadelphia: Open University Press/Milton Keynes.

It is based on the following assumptions:

- Educators work best on problems they have identified for themselves
- Teachers and principals become more effective when encouraged to examine and assess their own work, and then consider ways of working differently
- Teachers and principals need time and space away from their daily routine to think deeply about their work
- Teachers and principals can provide help, support and encouragement by working collaboratively

Action Research is systematic and involves collecting evidence on which to base rigorous reflection

Action Research involves problem posing, not just problem solving. It does not start from a view of problems as pathologies. It is motivated by a quest to improve and understand the world by changing it and learning how to improve it from the effects of the changes made.

Action Research is research by particular people on their own work to help them improve what they do, including how they work with and for others. Action Research does NOT treat people as objects. It treats people as autonomous, responsible agents who participate actively in making their own histories by knowing what they are doing.

Action Research is concerned with changing situations, not just interpreting them. It is not just about applying the scientific method to teaching or about using data to come to conclusions. It takes the researcher into view. Action Research is an evolving process of changing both the researcher and the situations in which he or she works.

Action Research: Five Phases

Problem Identification

- Why do you want to study this topic?
- Is this problem broad enough to allow for a range of insights and narrow enough to be manageable?

Plan of Action

- Will you look at your existing practices or develop and implement a new strategy?
- What data do you need to learn about your question?

Data Collection

- What, why, when, where and how will you collect your data?
- How will you ensure that you have multiple perspectives?

Data Analysis

- What can you learn from your data?
- What patterns, insights, and new understandings can you discover?

Plan for Future Actions

- What will you do differently in your class/school as a result of this study?
- How will you write about what you have learned so that your findings will be useful to others?

For more information on Action Research including examples of research reports check out Cathy Caro-Bruce's district website at <http://www.madison.k12.wi.us/sod/car/carabstractintro.html>

Another good source for information is provided by Broward County at <http://www.broward.k12.fl.us/hrd/actionresearchstudies/index.htm>