Agenda

- An overview about Action Research
- Types and characteristics of Action Research
- Action Research design
- Answer your questions
Definition of Action Research

A systematic inquiry to improve the quality of an organization and its performance. Typically is designed and conducted by practitioners who analyze data to improve their own practice.

Enact immediate changes as conducted within the researchers’ own working places.
History of Action Research

“Research leading to social action” (Lewin, 1948)

• A way to challenge established educational practices.
• Traditional research designs (e.g., experimental, case study, etc.) were too slow and disconnected from everyday education to really improve practice.
• “Researchers should justify themselves to practitioners, not practitioners to researchers” Lawrence Stenhouse (cited in Cochran-Smith)

Underlying assumption: Practitioners are capable of systematic inquiry into their own practice. Practitioners as insiders have valuable knowledge that needs to form basis for decision making.

Democratic research, Research with people not on people
Action Research Types - Philosophical Basis

Liberatory/Emancipatory framework – Critical action research: find new ways, policies, programs, resources to assist marginalized groups

• Examples: Retained students, disabled, parents who don’t speak English, nontenure teachers, issues related to racism, ethics, values, etc.

Pragmatic framework – Practical action research: focus on issues in one’s own classroom practices and see how to improve them. Everyday practices, making small changes at a local level.

• Examples: Students’ engagement in class, instructions
Example: A Critical Action Research

A biology teacher and his students raised a question about a near school toxic dump labeled as hazardous by Environmental Protection Agency. In the process, created a curriculum to explore issues related to science and society.

Example: A Practical Action Research

Research question: “How does student choice in learning activities and assessment affect student engagement?”

Used Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligences.

Results: Some students were uncomfortable with too much freedom.

Needed to refine their approach/assignment and do more research.

Characteristics of Action Research

- Takes place in practitioners/researchers’ own working place & practitioners take active roles in the research
- Involves in collaboration with other educators/colleagues
- Focuses on taking action to change and improve practices
- Is ongoing and includes several waves of data collection, reflection, and action
General Steps in Conducting Action Research, It is Flexible

1. Reflect on your practices, identify a problem/something to improve
2. Set the problem in the theoretical, research context by lit review
3. Reflection on your own experiences with the problem; how to use theory/studies; record reflections/share with the coresearchers
4. Identify person with whom you collaborate; can be colleagues or external who share similar interest
   - Data collection, analysis
5. Plan for systematic data collection; collect at least two types of data; often qualitative and quantitative; simple and short procedure
   - Action research is flexible but needs to have plan
   - How to collect data? Instruments? Sampling method and Sample size?

Steps in Conducting Action Research (Continued)

1. Analyze the data and reflect on what you are learning throughout the process:
   - Qual data: Theme identification; Quant data: descriptive statistics, graphs

2. Create plan of action based on the results: **unique part of action research**
   - Examples: Modification of a program, new outreach parents, changes in school policies

3. Plan the next cycle of research to carry out the action plan and assess whether it improves practices:
   - May include new research plan/data collection, analysis
Steps in Conducting Action Research (Continued)

Analyze all collected data and reflect on its meaning for practice

- Review with collaborators to interpret the results and analyze changes resulted from the action plan.
- Practitioners need to decide the meaning/implication of data for their practice.
- Time consuming to analyze the data.

Form tentative conclusions and determine what questions remained to be answered

- Action research an ongoing process to improve practice
Action Research Process Cycle

Main Stage 1
- Assess/Identify problem
- Set the problem in theoretical/research context
- Reflect on your own experience with the problem
- Identify the persons to collaborate
- Make a systematic data collection plan
- Collect and analyze the data
- Create/implement action plan based on the results
- Plan the next cycle/assess the effect of action plan
- Analyze all data and reflect on its meaning for practice
- Form conclusions and remaining questions

Main Stage 2

Main Stage 3

Main Stage 4
Action Research Ongoing Spiral Process

Continuous Improvement of Practice through Action Research
Evaluating Action Research

Typically do not use complex statistical analysis to evaluate the results; but offer evidence for validity, reliability of their measures.

Practical action researchers may not go through lengthy analysis of theoretical meaning behind the qualitative data.

Use the criteria for particular designs used in action research depending on the context; e.g., survey and case study.

- Can be complex to include all criteria for multiple designs in one action research
Specific Criteria for Evaluating Action Research

Questions as guidelines for evaluating action research (Creswell, 2013)

- Does the study clearly address a problem or issue in practice that needs to be addressed?
- Did the researcher develop a logical plan and collect data in a systematic, valid way?
- Were different types of data triangulated or compared?
- Did the researcher collaborate with others who had an interest in the problem?
- Did the research lead to a change or a solution to a problem that made a difference? Did it improve the lives of others or empower them to make changes in their lives?
- Did the plan of action contribute to the researcher’s ability to reflect on his or her professional activities?
Additional Resources

https://research.phoenix.edu/content/research-methodology-group/action-research

Articles/references

Journals

- Action Research, Sage Publication
- Educational Action Research, Taylor & Francis

Websites

- AERA action Research SIG
- Action research at some other universities (Brown, Queen’s University)
- Action Research Networks and Associations
In this update of November 2017, I have added Anne Keizer-Renmer's dissertation from the University of Humanistic Studies, Utrecht, The Netherlands.

- Michael Dany's dissertation on - A Reflective Study Of The Continuous Practice Improvement Of A Global Professional, 2016 University of Melbourne.

Helen O'Connor's Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology - From Underlying Values To Building Educational Foundations: How The Values Of Education Sveriges Were Influential In Founding The Sveriges School, 2013 Anglia Ruskin University.


- Keith Kinsella's Ph.D. (2011) Thesis, Revealing what is "motivationally-invisible" in the kindergarten: An online cohering narrative for developing...
Upcomings

- Participate in the asynchronous discussion threads (Ongoing)
- Next meeting: Content Analysis (Dec 6, 4-5 pm Arizona Time)
References


Questions?

Research Methodology Group