How-To Article

Teacher as Researcher Taking Action Research to Task

Curious as to whether a new teaching technique is making a real difference in the classroom? Want evidence to show your administrator that your newly implemented strategy works in the classroom? Learn more about the role action research can play in your classroom.

Action research can be as simple as testing a new teaching method, or it can answer far more complex questions about curriculum, school management, or other large, multidimensional issues.

Action Research Defined

Simply put, action research is the process of systematically testing new ideas in the classroom or school, analyzing the results, and deciding to implement the new idea or begin the process again with another idea.

Action research differs from formal research conducted by education theorists because it is typically designed and controlled directly by the teacher or in collaboration with other practitioners.

Classroom action research

- begins with a question, such as "Why don't my students take better notes?"
- proposes a classroom-based practice (intervention) to change the identified problem, such as "Will using a graphic organizer to teach a concept improve note-taking skills?"
- uses a systematic approach to testing and analyzing the idea or intervention (Did it improve their skills? How?)
- is teacher or practitioner directed
- has an end goal of improving a teaching practice or other educational process

Compelling Reasons to Conduct Action Research

Many teachers argue that the problem with theory is that it ignores practice. Theory is often tied to large-scale research projects designed and conducted by educational researchers, with little or no teacher input.

Of course, formal research occupies an important place in the field of education; yet, it can be difficult to translate its findings into new practices. Action research allows teachers to pursue critical inquiry to activate change, on their own terms. Teachers may want to take formal research findings and translate them into their own action research question.

We offer a list of five compelling reasons to undertake an action research project this year.

- It will help you build a reflective practice, based on proven techniques.
- It allows you to try out new ideas and reliably assess their effectiveness.
- It will build confidence in your instructional decisions.
- It contributes to the professional culture of teaching at your school.
- It can create meaningful and lasting change in your practice, your students' learning, and your school.

Three Levels of Action Research

There are typically three different levels of action research. The first level is conducted by an individual to test methods for implementation in the classroom. The second level is undertaken by a group of teachers testing a method for use department or grade. The third level involves teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders; its purpose is to affect change in the larger school community.

Conducting Action Research: A Simple Methodology

In order to conduct your research systematically, you need to choose an action research method. There are many available, some more rigorous than others. Here we offer a simplified set of steps that are included in most action research projects. Ultimately, you must decide on a method or define one of your own based on your readings.

1. **Identify the question, issue, or problem.**
   This is always your starting point. You may need time to determine the right focus for your question.

2. **Define a solution.**
   The solution will be a new instructional technique, strategy, new environment, or new material that you feel has potential to correct the problem.

3. **Apply the solution and collect data.**
   Here you will need to define how you will apply the technique and the method you will use to collect your data. If possible, it is helpful to have at least two groups that you can use for your research, one acting as the test group and one for the control group (the group that doesn't use the strategy or technique). You will need to define in advance how you will record reactions to your intervention.

4. **Analyze your findings.**
   Determine whether the solution had an impact on learning. This is where having a control group to compare your test groups can help you determine whether the technique has caused a desirable change, an undesirable change, or no change at all.

5. **Take action.**
   This can be either in the form of revising your intervention and returning to Step 2 to test another intervention, or by changing your practice to reflect a successful new technique.

Read more about it…

http://www.vtaide.com/png/ERIC/Teacher-Researcher.htm

Teacher-As-Researcher

ERIC Digest article

Read a brief article by author Beverly Johnson discussing the purpose, benefits, and effects of teacher-instigated classroom research.