



# What is Action Research?

**The goal of Action Research** is to investigate a self-selected issue in your own classroom to effect positive changes in your teaching and in your students' learning.

Action Research is a process in which participants examine their own educational practice systematically and carefully using the techniques of research. It is based on the following assumptions:

- Teachers work best on problems they have identified for themselves;
- Teachers become more effective when encouraged to examine and assess their own work and then consider ways of working differently;
- Teachers help each other by working collaboratively.

## What Action Research Is Not

- It is **not** the usual things teachers do when they think about their teaching. Action Research is systematic and involves collecting evidence on which to base rigorous reflection.
- It is **not** just problem-solving. 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.
- It is **not** the scientific method applied to teaching. Action Research is **not** about hypothesis-testing or using data to come to conclusions. It is concerned with changing situations, not just interpreting them.

## Starting Points

1. I would like to improve...
2. I am perplexed by...
3. Some people are unhappy about...
4. I'm really curious about...
5. I want to learn more about...
6. An idea I would like to try out in my class is...
7. Something I think would really make a difference is...
8. Something I would like to do is change...
9. Right now, some areas I'm particularly interested in are...

## Guidelines for Developing a Question

- Higher level questions which get at explanations, reasons, relationships. "How does...?", "What happens when...?"
- Not a "Yes-No" question
- Everyday language; avoid jargon
- Not too lengthy; concise; doesn't have to include everything you're thinking
- Something manageable; can complete it and something doable (in the context of your work)
- Keep it close to your own practice; the further away you go, the more work it is
- Meaningful to you; provides you with a deeper understanding of the topic
- Question leads to other questions

### **Template for Your Final Write-Up**

- Your name/what you do
- Background information (setting, population, school, class)
- Question (expectations, assumptions, evolution, if applicable)
- Why you chose the question (rationale). What drew you to the question?
- Why it's important to you
- Actual data (children's drawings/writing, photos, quotes, voices; adult quotes; observations)
- Literature review/references (if used)
- Struggles (to arrive at question, to collect data, findings, etc.)
- Reflections on action research process, separate from the topic
- Changes you've gone through in the process; insights, inconsistencies
- Conclusions/findings; what I learned; interpretation
- Feelings, intuitions not encountered in the study
- Future directions; Where do I go from here?; impact; new questions; ideas for implementation changes in practice/perspective; recommendations

### **What Do Teacher Researchers Do?**

- They develop research questions based on their own curiosity about teaching and learning;
- They examine their underlying assumptions about teaching and learning;
- They systematically document their observations and reflections;
- They analyze and interpret information they've collected;
- They write about their research;
- They share their findings with families.

### **What Are Some Effects of Teacher Research Projects?**

- Enhanced communication between teachers and students;
- Empowerment of teachers, giving them confidence in their ability to promote change;
- Improved performance of students;
- Revision of practice based on new knowledge about teaching and learning;

### **Techniques for Gathering Data**

- Write your observations over time (include dates in your notes)
- Document your reflections as you proceed
- Include anecdotes, photos, comments by children and family members

*Adapted from the Madison (WI) Metropolitan School District*