

## Action Research

The introduction of the reform curriculum following the education reform has resulted in classroom teachers, head teachers, inspectors and other key players making major changes to the way they do their work. For example, teachers now have to teach using the outcomes based approach which requires different teaching strategies from ones they are familiar with and learning new methods of planning, programming and conducting assessment.

One way to help change practice is to undertake research that looks critically at work practices and ask questions that enable reflection on practice and improvement to work and the workplace.

### Why undertake research?

Action research enables teachers to understand and improve their practice as teachers in the classroom. Action research is easy to undertake and is concerned about improving the way a teacher, head teacher, inspector or anyone else for that matter does his/her job. In most cases, it is classroom based and requires few resources except for the teacher's time and commitment.

### Different types of research

Traditional research involves formulating a hypothesis, designing the research proposal, developing questionnaires and doing quantitative analysis.

Participatory research (ethnography) involves studying subjects while living among the research subjects to get a fuller understanding of the people

Action research is aimed at improving a certain practice or a way of life.

### What is action research (AR)?

Action research is the process by which practitioners attempt to study their work related problems in a scientific manner in order to improve their workplace and work practices.

“Action research is inquiry or research in the context of focused efforts to improve the quality of an organization and its performance. It typically is designed and conducted by practitioners who analyze the data to improve their own practice. Action research can be done by individuals or by teams of colleagues. The team approach is called **collaborative inquiry**.

Typically, action research is undertaken in a school setting but the methods and techniques can be used in other areas as well. It is a reflective process that allows for inquiry and discussion as components of the research.

### What is not AR?

Action research is not a library project where we learn more about a topic that interests us. It is not about gaining knowledge. It is not a problem solving exercise in the sense of trying to find out what is wrong with something. AR is not about doing research on or

about people, nor is about finding all the available information on topic and looking for the correct answers. It is not about learning why we do certain things.

## **What Action Research is?**

AR is about **how** we can do things better, not why. It is about how we can change, for example, how our instructions to students impact on their learning. It employs scientific techniques to identify problems, collect information and find solutions.

AR is conducted by practitioners, not by outsiders and is concerned about work related problems. It aims to improve practice or work environment

## **Types of Action Research**

- Individual teacher research - focus single issue
- Collaborative action research - single classroom or several classrooms
- School wide action research - school issue or problem or area of collective interest
- Province-wide research - provincial issue, organisational structure

## **What are the steps in conducting Action Research?**

### **1. Identify a problem area**

Identification of a problem usually starts with a question or a number of questions. It is important to limit the questions to one or two that is meaningful and 'do-able'. Consider these criteria before you seriously put your time and effort into conducting research.

The question you ask should:

- be a higher order question - not a yes/no question
- be stated in clear or common language
- be concise
- be meaningful
- not already have an answer

Also consider: do you have influence over the question or area that you have chosen? Is it interesting and worth the time and energy that will be spent?

### **2. Collect data**

The collection of data is an important step in deciding what action needs to taken. Multiple sources of data are used to better understand the scope of happenings in the classroom, school or even the province.

There are many types of data that can be collected. For example,

Interviews

journals

individual files

Portfolios  
photographs

Diaries  
Field notes

log of meetings

Select the data that is most appropriate for the issue being research. Make sure the data is easy to collect and that sources readily available?

### **3. Interpret the data**

Once you have collected your data, organise it so that it is possible to identify trends and themes. Data can be grouped into classroom data, individual data or sub groups according to gender, age, class groups.

Analyse the data and identify the main themes.

*Data analysis falls into two areas: quantitative and qualitative*

Data such as opinions can be reviewed together and major themes or issues arising from them noted

### **4. Act on Evidence**

Using the information from data collection and review of current literature, design a plan of action that will allow you to make a change and to study that change. It is important to change one thing at a time so that you are able to

### **5. Evaluate the results**

Assess the effects of the intervention to determine if improvement has occurred. If there is improvement, do the data clearly provide the evidence? If not, what changes can be made to the actions to get better results?

### **6. Next steps**

As a result of the action research project, identify additional questions raised by the data and plan for additional improvements, revisions and next steps.