

# Action Research: A Refresher

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# Agenda

An overview about  
Action Research

Types and  
characteristics of  
Action Research

Action Research  
problem, questions,  
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 & Lytle, 1993)

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

Democratic research is Research with people not on people

# Action Research Types- Philosophical Basis

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

- Examples: Retained students, disables, 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.

- King , B. (1990), Creating Curriculum together: teachers, students, and collaborative investigation. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Boston. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED322111>

# 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 .

- Jordan, L. & Hendricks, C. (2002) Increasing sixth grade students engagement in literacy, *Learning Networks*, 5(1).

# Research Problem

Discuss the problem to be addressed

If focusing on one organization, it's fine to cite organizational leadership as “personal communication”, per APA

If critical action research with a broader focus, cite the literature



# Research Purpose

State the method (qualitative or mixed methods) and design, such as practical action research, or Critical action research.

Describe the research participants, your role in the research, and their role in the research.

State the objectives must align with the design.

# Research Questions - Examples

## Practical Action Research

What factors are contributing to the process issues?

What changes can be implemented to create prospective process improvement?

What were the impacts of the implemented changes?

## Critical Action Research

What are the potential benefits and challenges of each option for addressing the issue, and which option might produce the optimal results?

What policy and practice changes must be implemented to facilitate the selected option, what is the expected outcome for the organization, and is the solution transferable to broader societal issues?

# 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

# Action Research Process Cycle



Dickens, L., & Watkins, K. (1999). Action research: rethinking Lewin. *Management Learning*, 30(2), 127-140. doi: 10.1177/1350507699302002

# General Steps in Conducting Action Research, It is Flexible

Reflect on your practices, identify a problem/something to improve

Set the problem in the theoretical, research context by lit review

Reflection on your own experiences with the problem; how to use theory/studies; record reflections/share with the coresearchers

Identify person with whom you collaborate; can be colleagues or external who share similar interest

- Data collection, analysis

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

Analyze the data and reflect on what you are learning throughout the process

- Qual data: Theme identification ; Quant data: descriptive statistics, graphs

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

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)

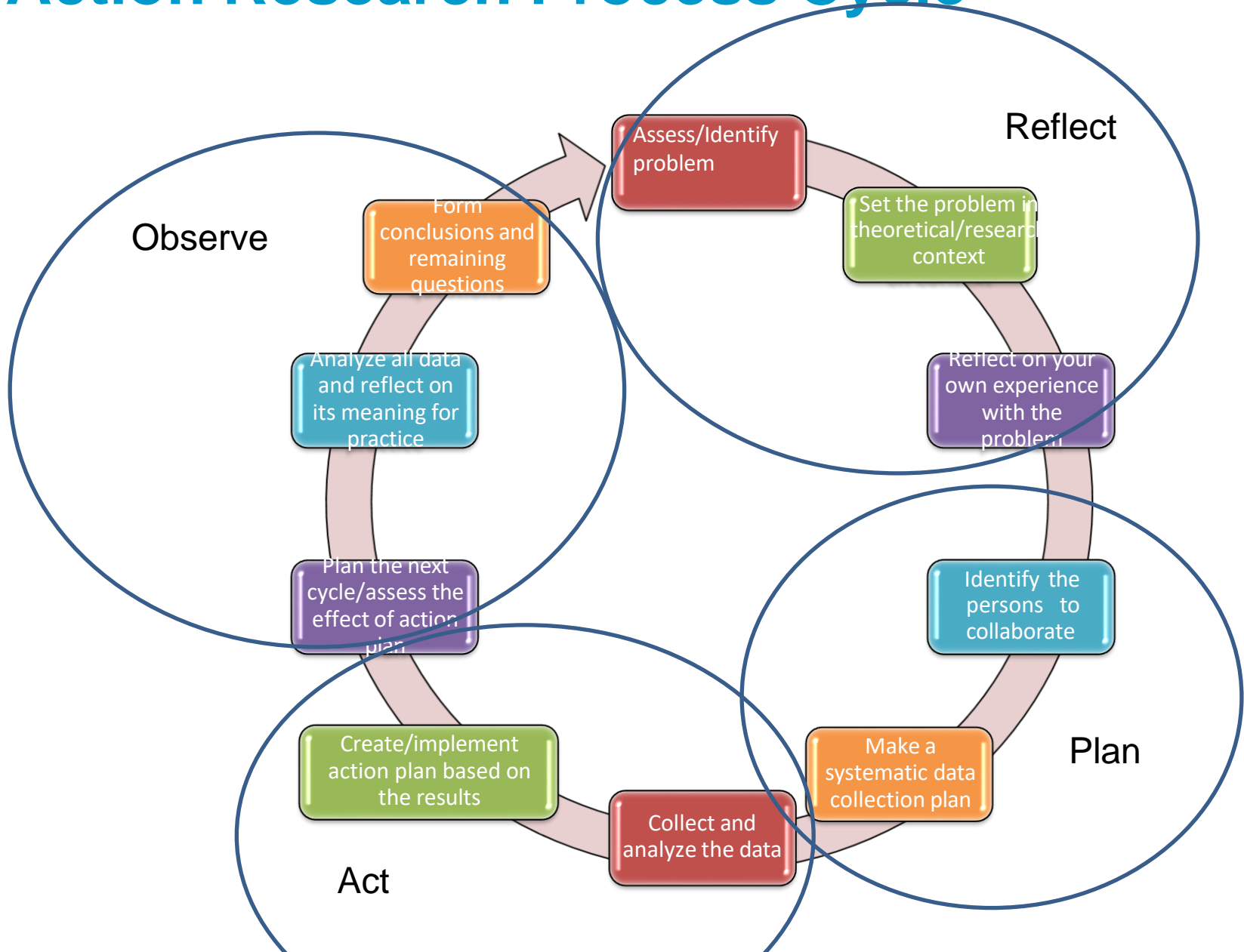
Analyze all collected data and reflect on its meaning for practice

- 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





# Action Research Ongoing Spiral Process

Cycle n

Cycle 3

Cycle 2

Cycle 1



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 the validity, and reliability of their measures.

Practical action researchers may not go through a lengthy analysis of the 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

[Action Research - Dissertation Guide Readings - University Library at University of Phoenix Library](#)

## 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

# Doctoral Dissertations & Master Theses using Action Research, <http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml>

**Ph.D.**

[Michael Russell's Doctoral Thesis on 'Privileging Tacit Knowledge within a Software Engineering Curriculum: A Living Educational Theory of Practice', Maynooth University, 2021.](#)

**Ph.D.**

[John Branch's Doctorate of Professional Studies by Public Works on 'Teaching Is Like Engineering: My Living Educational Theory', Middlesex University, 2020.](#)

**Ph.D.**

[Christine Jones' doctorate on - My living-theory of living inclusive and inclusion empowerment: a Living Theory research approach, Liverpool Hope University, UK, 2019.](#)

**Ph.D.**

[Anne Keizer-Remmer's doctorate on - Underneath The Surface Of Cosmopolitanism: In Search of Cosmopolitanism In Higher Education. University of Humanistic Studies, Utrecht, the Netherlands, 2017.](#)

**Ph.D.**

[Sadrudin Bahadur Qutoshi's doctorate on - Creating Living-Educational-Theory: A Journey Towards Transformative Teacher Education in Pakistan, 2016 University of Kathmandu, Nepal.](#)

**Ph.D.**

[Helen O' Connor's Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology - From Unearthing Values To Building Educational Foundations: How The Values Of Education Swanage Were Influential In Founding The Swanage School, 2015 Anglia Ruskin University.](#)

[Nicole Lee Scott's Master of Technology Dissertation, TELLING TALES: Pictograms as a Visual Voice, 2013 Durban University of Technology.](#)

**Ph.D.**

[Dejysia Timm's Doctor of Technology: Education \(2012\) Thesis, Towards The Biochemical Nature Of Learning And Its Implication For Learning, Teaching And Assessment: A Study Through Literature And Experiences Of Learners And Educators, Durban University of Technology, 2012.](#)

**Ph.D.**

[Jack Whitehead's Ph.D. Volume Two \(1999\) Thesis, How do I improve my practice? Creating a discipline of education through educational enquiry, University of Bath.](#)

**Ph.D.**

[Phil Tattersall's Ph.D. \(2011\) Thesis, How am I generating a living theory of environmental activism with inclusionality? Graduating April 2013, from the University of Western Sydney.](#)

**Ph.D.**

**Ph.D.**

[Arianna Briganti's Doctoral Thesis on 'My living-theory of International Development', Graduated from University of Lancaster in November 2021.](#)

**Ph.D.**

[Merna Meyer's doctorate on 'Becoming participatory artists, researchers and teachers: my living theory of Art Education' North West University, South Africa, 2019.](#)

**Ph.D.**

[Elizabeth Campbell's doctorate on - How has love influenced me as a teacher researcher, and learner? A narrative inquiry into a teacher's abrupt awakenings, Nipissing University, Canada, 2018](#)

**Ph.D.**

[Bruce Damon's doctorate on - A Collaboratively Constructed Process Model For Understanding And Supporting The Work Of The Community Volunteer In A Community School, 2017 Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, South Africa.](#)

**Ph.D.**

[Michael Dent's doctorate on - A Reflexive Study Of The Continuous Practice Improvement Of A Global Professional, 2016 University of Malaya.](#)

**Ph.D.**

[Elizabeth Wolvaardt's Doctoral Thesis, Over the conceptual horizon of public health: A living theory of teaching undergraduate medical students, 2013 University of Pretoria.](#)

[Bonnie Kaplan's Master of Technology Dissertation, How do I use my living and lived experience to influence creative economic independence in others? 2013 Durban University of Technology.](#)

**Ph.D.**

[Yvonne Crotty's Ph.D. \(2012\) Thesis, How am I bringing an educationally entrepreneurial spirit into higher education? Dublin City University, 2012.](#)

**Ph.D.**

[Simon Hughes' Ph.D. \(2012\) Thesis, Towards auto/pedagogy: A reflexive auto/biographic case study of professional learning mediated by technology, University of Wolverhampton.](#)

**Ph.D.**

[Keith Kinsella's Ph.D. \(2012\) Thesis, Revealing what is 'tacit/rationally-invisible/in the background': an online coaching pedagogy for developing improved leadership practice through 'presencing empathetic responsiveness' University of Bath.](#)

**Ph.D.**

# Next steps...

[Visit and join the Research Methodology Group](#)

Join [Research Methodology Group Teams](#)

- Review materials
- Recorded webinars
- Short burst learning Videos
- Office hours

Provide us with your feedback

- Complete this very brief [Survey](#) (less than 1 minute)

Next meeting: How to Self-Publish an Academic Work

- June 15, 5-6 pm Arizona Time
- Access via [the Workshop site](#)

# References

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design Choosing among Five Approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA SAGE

Lewin, K (1948). *Resolving social conflicts; selected papers on group dynamic*. Gertrude W. Lewin (Ed.). New York: Harper & Row.

Lodio, M.G., Spaulding, D.T., & Voegtle, K.H. (2010). *Methods in Educational Research: From Theory to Practice*. Wiley.

Dickens, L., & Watkins, K. (1999). Action research: rethinking Lewin. *Management Learning*, 30(2), 127-140. doi: 10.1177/1350507699302002

# Questions?

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