

The Action Research Cycle



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The Clark County School District (CCSD) defines action research as a self-reflective process of researching one's own educational practices with the purpose of understanding and improving the quality of instruction. Action research is systematic inquiry. Following specific steps insures quality data collection and analysis, which leads to valid outcomes. Action research is also iterative, meaning it is an on-going cycle. While answering one question, others arise begging to be investigated. As one CCSD action researcher has said, "Action research is personal professional development." A brief review of each part of the process

is presented. For a complete description or more guidance, participate in our annual Action Research Project.

The **first** step is to identify your goal, or your research question. This starts with identifying your area of concern, refining your focus to a specific problem, and possible solution strategy you want to try. Begin with one of your instructional practices that you would like to improve or change. Ask yourself, why are you concerned? What can you do about it? What are you willing to do about it? Research possible solutions: discuss solutions with peers or mentors, look up solutions in books, research journals, or online databases, such as [ERIC](#). Select a strategy that you believe will be effective. Finally, plan how you will proceed. Decide: how much time will you need (6 weeks, 9 weeks, 7 months?), who will participate, will you have collaborators, what resources you need, any approvals that may be necessary. Write it all out.

Second, implement your plan. Obtain approvals from administrators, parents or students. Obtain equipment or any materials you will need. If your action research question requires baseline measures, administer a pre-test or survey. We recommend that you keep a reflective journal during your action research. Writing out your progress or thoughts related to the action research will help you evaluate your action research question. Your reflective journal may be used also as a source of data. Be flexible, as you may need to revise your question or your new strategy along the way.

The **third** step is to collect data. Consider data sources that provide evidence about your action research question. These may include photographs, interviews, surveys, discussions, observations, video recordings, field notes, student work, test scores, or reflective journals. One aspect of data collection is to insure your data meets methodological rigor. Rigor may be in collecting and triangulating different types of data. It may be in the form of quality survey questions or test data. Rigor may also come in the having participants or “critical friends” provide input into your data collection and analysis.

Fourth, with data collected you will need to analyze it. Analysis consists of finding trends or patterns in the data. Numerical data needs summarizing, describing, and analyzing using statistical formulae. One may look for statistically significant correlations or differences between means. Textual, visual, or verbal data often is coded and organized into themes. Another approach may be to develop a concept map that explains your data. What were your findings? Did the intended effects appear? What were the unintended effects? What issues arose? Are there critical activities that need to occur first?

Finally, share your results with other teachers, administrators and action researchers. Sharing your results is important to education. You have added to what is known about education. Your findings guide educators towards more effective instructional practices. You will find greater insight into your action research project as you share your findings with others. Discuss what you did and what you found out in faculty meetings, informal meetings, and online discussions. You can write your findings for an action research journal or website. As an Action Research Project participant, you could also present your findings at the CCSD Action Research Data Fair.

References

- Mills, G. E. (2003). *Action Research: A Guide for the Teacher Researcher*. Merrill Prentice Hall: Upper Saddle River, NJ.
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- Sagor, R. (2005). *The Action Research Guidebook: A Four-Step Process for Educators and School Teams*. Corwin Press: Thousand Oaks, CA.