Community College Action Research
An Overview of Origins, and Applications

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Purpose of the Presentation

• To Familiarize Participants with Action Research
• To Review Foundations, Terminology, and Scope of Action Research
• To Present Major Issues Related To Validity
• To Present Major Issues Related to Acceptability
• To Explore Major Issues with Action Research for Investigation
• To Provide Resources and Recommended Readings (not to train Action Researchers)
• And For You to Begin Participating... NOW!

If US Homes and Habitat for Humanity each built the identical home to specifications, would you have the same "Outcome"? What could be the differences? Take one (1) minute to write down your observations.
What is Action Research

- As much a philosophical approach as a way of structuring a data gathering system of understanding and inquiry
- Very similar to what has been called the “Research Practitioner” model of practice
- A disciplined method of Inquiry for making Practical Decisions

What is Action Research (Cont.)

- Action research consists of a family of research methodologies which pursue action and research outcomes at the same time. Action research is action and research in the same process. It has twin, aims of action for change in an organization or community, with research to increase our knowledge and understanding.


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Terms You Encounter

action research; participatory action research (PAR); practitioner research; action science; collaborative action research; educative research; appreciative inquiry; emancipator Praxis; community-based participatory research; teacher research; participatory rural appraisal; feminist action research; feminist, antiracist participatory action research; and advocacy activist, or militant research. (Anderson & Herr, 2005, p. 2)

What You Can Do With Action Research

• **Enhance everyday work practices**
  - Review goals and procedures
  - Evaluate effectiveness, goal achievement
  - Planning activities, strategy generation

• **Address crisis or resolve a problem**
  - Problem definition
  - Exploring context
  - Analyzing component parts
  - Strategy generation towards resolution

• **Develop special projects or programs**
  - Planning
  - Implementing
  - Evaluating

Fruitful Places for Action Research

**Education (including but not limited to):**
- School Development
- Curriculum Development
- Evaluation
- Classroom processes
- Class projects
- Special programs
- Parent participation
- On-site management

**Organizational Development**
- Planning or review
- Change process
- Project and program development
- Training programs and human resource development
- Cross-cultural programs
The Issue of Empowerment

- A focus on process
- A dominant theme especially applied to field of social science (neighborhood empowerment projects) and education (classroom collaboration models)
- Participatory Evaluation
- Contextually Greater Changes/Deeper Understandings

Many Ways to Implement

- Compatible with numerous models of research and evaluation
  - Logic Model, CIPPS
  - Case study (with interventions)
  - Level of “sophistication” in methodology and measurement depends on the “Community”
- Not a “laboratory” approach
- Data based decision making in any system
- Data Collection can be action research

Ways to Envision the General Model

- Usually a feedback loop
- Emphasis on period of reflection and continuance of action
Cycles, Feedback, Reflection, Inclusion, Decisions, & Change as a continuous process that also includes new learning and an improved context for future cycles

A Common Cycle Description

Classic Cycle Description: PAOR
Approach Continuum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consensus model of society</th>
<th>Conflict model of society</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RESEARCH BASED</td>
<td>ACTION FOCUSED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>Practical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emancipatory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>Organizational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalizing</td>
<td>Empowering</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

What Action Research is Not

- An “easy way out”
- A Qualitative Methodology
- “Business as Usual”
- A Way to describe something you did that was not planned
- A Single, Clearly Defined Approach

“...it is not action for research (doing in order to increase understanding), nor research for action (increasing knowledge in order to be applied at a later time), but a coming together of two purposes in a single project or process. Action research is not a research method, as many methods of data collection may be used in action research projects. It is, rather, a way of doing research and acting to change situations at the same time.”

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Historical Foundations & Development

- Kurt Lewin “Plan, Act, Observe, Reflect”
- Dewey, Rousseau, Kolb learning from experience “do, think, learn”
- Stringer “look, act, think”
Dewey, Stringer and Lewin Parallels

Importance of the social environment for learning to take place
Cyclical nature of learning
Value of a unique individual in the experience
Purposeful Inquiry

"Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand" (Confucius, c. 450 BC)

The research needed for social practice can best be characterized as research for social management or social engineering. It is a type of action-research, a comparative research on the conditions and the effects of various forms of social action, and research leading to social action. Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice (Lewin, 1946, as reproduced in Lewin, 1948, pp. 202-203)
The first step then is to examine the idea carefully in the light of the means available. Frequently more fact-finding about the situation is required. If this first period of planning is successful, two items emerge: namely, "an overall plan" of how to reach the objective and secondly, a decision in regard to the first step of action. Usually this planning has also somewhat modified the original idea. (Lewin, 1948, p. 205)
Origins of Action Research

- Social sciences and education both seem to claim “creation” rights
- A lot of emphasis in Great Britain (education) and Australia (community based programs) today
- Community empowerment organizations

Role of the “researcher”

- Collaborations
- Consulting
- Empowerment
- Resource
- Positionality
Table 2.1 Research relationships, degree of collaboration in action research types (adapted from: Hart & Bond, 1995, p. 43)

<table>
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<th>Relationships/Role Continuum</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>co-researchers/co-change agents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Shared roles)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Insider (researcher studies own practice)**
  - Self-Study, Practitioner research, autobiography

- **Insider collaborates with Insider**
  - Consciousness raising groups, inquiry/study groups, teams

- **Insider in collaboration with Outsiders**
  - Self-Study, Practitioner research, autobiography

- **Reciprocal Collaborations (insider-outsider teams)**
  - Collaborative forms of participatory action research, equitable forms of power relationships

- **Outsider in collaboration with Insiders**
  - Major agency change, community empowerment, organizational learning

- **Outsiders study Insiders**
  - Academic research on action research methods or projects

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**How is Action Research Used**

- **Company/Businesses**
  - Democratic Approach (Scandinavian)

- **School Sites**
  - Site-Based
  - Self-Study

- **World Health Organization**
  - Community Development

- **Academic Research**
  - Doctoral Dissertations and Master Thesis

- **Social Change**
  - Green Peace/Environmental Racism
Self-Studies as Action Research

What elements of a self-study for accrediting commissions or agencies (e.g., WASC, ACCJC, HLC) meet the description of action research?

Take one (1) minute to write your answers.

Service-Learning:

A structured, volunteer work experience. Students provide community service in non-paid, volunteer positions to give them opportunities to apply knowledge and skills learned in school while making a contribution to local communities. The served determine the services, but all participants in the experience change in ways more profound than the labor itself.

What elements of Service-Learning are similar to those of Action Research?
Take one (1) minute to write your answers.

Validity

Anderson and Herr’s Goals of Action Research and Validity Criteria (p. 55). These goals can also be described as indicators of quality.

<table>
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<th>Goals of Action Research</th>
<th>Quality/Validity Criteria</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. The generation of new knowledge</td>
<td>Dialogic and process validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The achievement of action-oriented outcomes</td>
<td>Outcome validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The education of both researcher and participants</td>
<td>Catalytic validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Results that are relevant to the local setting</td>
<td>Democratic validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. A sound and appropriate research methodology</td>
<td>Process validity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Validity as “did it do as intended” as an action research intervention and include the right participants
• Not the same paradigm as Campbell and Stanley Internal/External for describing threats to the validity or “authenticity” of the project
• More to do with the integrity of implementation and complete accurate accounting for what happened to all involved from many sources. Often includes looking for philosophical foundation indicators.

• There are many existing procedures familiar to researchers, evaluators, and program managers for verifying action research
• “Scientific Models” do not provide adequate ways to assess Action Research mainly due to the context of the observations and the intentions of the researcher
• Requires an acceptance of the belief that the “Scientific” method shares the title of legitimate inquiry approach with several others and is not the only way to learn or demonstrate high level achievement
• Draws heavily on arguments from Qualitative research and Naturalistic Inquiry

Defining Validity (Cont.)

• Stringer (1996) agrees with Lincoln and Guba (1985) that Action Research is “identified as trustworthy” by establishing 6 conditions whose attainment is gained through a combination of 12 procedures
• Be able to determine and “trust the truthfulness or adequacy of a research project” (Stringer, 2004, p. 56)
• Conditions include: Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, Confirmability, Degrees of Participation, and Utility
Establishing Trustworthiness (validity) through 12 procedures

- Prolonged Engagement
- Persistent Observation
- Triangulation
- Participant Debriefing
- Negative Case Analysis
- Referential Adequacy
- Member Checks
- Transferability
- Dependability
- Confirmability
- Participation
- Utility

What About You?

- Think about what it would take to convince you in a study
- It appears that the less you can control (account for through empirical methods) in the environment, the more you have to describe in order for your results to be accepted as “valid”
- It also appears that many or all of the validity concerns in empirical studies are identical to those of action research studies
- Do you trust laboratory controls or real life explanations

“Acceptability”

- Different than validity, more closely related to traditions, political forces, and contexts that tend to favor one type of “legitimate” inquiry over another.
- Differentiate educational inquiry acceptability from in the field implementation acceptability
- Better in some disciplines than others for “academic” writing
- Favored among many working in the field
“Acceptability”

- Take a moment and reflect upon your own thoughts about using an action research approach in a study
- Take a moment and reflect upon your own thoughts about using an action research approach in your own work setting

Action Research Resources

- An excellent resource (but complete with obvious bias that is easy to adjust for) in this area
- Some notable quotes for discussion are in the following slides:

There is a tendency for action researchers to be insiders to their professional settings, making them at once both researcher and practitioner. These practitioner researchers often want to study their own contexts because they want the research to make a difference in their own setting and sometimes, often mistakenly, because they think it will be more convenient and easier to do the study where they work. (p. 2)
Addressing Bias in Action Research

In any investigation, it will be necessary to address how one’s bias is dealt with in the research. This may be somewhat different for one who is an insider to the setting than the one who is an outsider conducting participatory research...while bias and subjectivity are natural and acceptable in action research as long as they are critically examined rather than ignored, other mechanisms may need to be put in place to ensure that they do not have a distorting effect on outcomes. (p. 60)

Generalizability of Action Research

Stake's concept of naturalistic generalization is similar in many ways to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) notion of transferability, in which findings are not generalized but rather transfer from a sending context to a receiving context. (pp. 61-62)

Transferability

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

- If there is to be transferability, the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere. The original inquirer cannot know the sites to which transferability might be sought, but the appliers can and do. The best advice to give anyone seeking to make the transfer is to accumulate empirical evidence about contextual similarity; the responsibility of the original investigator ends in providing sufficient descriptive data to make such similarity judgments possible.
The Nature of Proposals

Typically an action research proposal will more closely resemble one by a qualitative than a quantitative researcher, because, as with qualitative research, the design is emergent. While quantitative research proposals must be written in final form, both qualitative and action research proposals must begin the research with a clear direction but with the anticipation that as data gathering and analysis proceed, the questions, methods, design, and participants may all shift somewhat. A good action research proposal will provide sufficient literature to frame the initial problem and anticipate directions the research might take.

Research Investigation
Feasibility/Scope

Because of the ongoing nature of action research, it may not be possible to write up the whole understanding, but rather just a piece of the understanding or intervention that has come about through the inquiry. The researcher may be well aware that the inquiry continues to unfold but may make the decision to write up just a part of it for the purposes of documentation. It is not that the research is finished; rather, the researcher bounds the document for purposes of dissemination. This results in a document that is essentially an accounting of the research thus far. (p. 85)

Think About a Request to Conduct Action Research at the Institution

- Privacy
- Property
- Propriety
- Permission
- Policy
- Liability
- Feasibility
- Control

Are there areas as an Administrator that you need to attend to that are not the same as Academic issues?
The Methodology
With action research and the assumption of the research spiral, this premise of an evolving methodology is a virtual given. The researcher must have a high of latitude in terms of the evolution of the methodology and where successive cycles of plan – act – observe – reflect take the research. (p. 76)

Results and Discussion
• These will be extensive and will include several forms of data.
• A thick and rich description that includes the context and processes sufficient for transferability
• Quantitative and qualitative data analysis
• Often include long term or wide spread impact statements, conjecture or discussion of greater meaning
• Often will be a slice of the process

Issues for Institutional Review and the Protection of Human Subjects
Typically, researchers are asked to initially describe the purposes of the research and the procedures to the potential participant...then given a consent form.

Institutional Review Board is concerned with ethical procedures and consent from human subjects that participation voluntary, subjects have been informed and the investigator is competent.

What look like fairly straightforward procedures to judge informed consent get muddied with action research. (p. 118)
Issues for the Institutional Review Boards and the Protection of Human Subjects (Cont.)

The relationships between the researcher and the participants take multiple forms, depending on the researcher’s position. These shifting relationships make it difficult to track down who is consenting to what. The informed consent procedures also obscure the sense of agency that many participants have as they join the action research process (p. 119).

Issues for the Institutional Review Boards and the Protection of Human Subjects (Cont.)

Researchers are required to appraise the Institutional Review Board Office of any changes in the research that may involve a shift in what was originally asked of the participants. But Institutional Review Boards vary in their interpretations regarding what are significant enough changes whereby the researcher should consult them again for a revised proposal and/or new consent (p. 119).

Resources on Action Research

- Books
- Journals
- Authors
- Web sites
- Organizations
List of Recommended Texts

For General Practice:

Business:

Education:

Behavioral Sciences:

Classic Recommended Reading

- http://books.mirror.org/gb.dewey.html downloadable version of John Dewey’s *Democracy and Education*

E-Journals, Organizations, and Web Resources

- http://www.triangle.co.uk/ear/
- http://arj.sagepub.com/
- http://newsextensions.mississippi.edu/docs/about.html
- http://www.mipismissip.ca/oar/
- http://www.fiu.edu/newspubs/lare.html
- http://www.siu.edu/n/health/psych/ari/ari-papers.html
- http://www.emtech.net/actionresearch.htm
- http://www.parnet.org/
- http://www.did.stu.mmu.ac.uk/carn/pubs.shtml
Some Bookmarks

- Action Research for Information Technology
- Action Research - Archive of Issues by Date
- Action Research and evaluations - Younger Families Learning Exchange - Australian Institute of Family Studies
- Action Research - Electronic Reader
- Action Research and Program
- Action Research Methodology
- Action Research Resource Papers
- Action Research
- An Action Research Approach to Evaluation Capacity Building
- Empowerment Evaluation Collaborating Action Research and a Case Example
- EPAA Vol. 1 No. 1 Kemmis Action Research
- Evidence-Based Practice
- Internet Resources For Participatory Action Research
- Kurt Lewin groups, experiential learning and action research
- NSDC - Standards About the Standards - Evaluation
- Standards
- Website / Webpage
- An Introduction
- Women's Health and Action Research Centre