ACTION RESEARCH: An Overview

This presentation is primarily based on the pamphlet: *What Every Teacher Should Know About Action Research* by Andrew Johnson (2003).
“Action research, as disciplined inquiry, is an invaluable tool that allows educational leaders to reflect upon their practices, programs, and procedures” (Glanz, 2003, p.27).
Definition:

• “The process of studying a real school or classroom situation in order to understand and improve the quality of actions or instruction (from Johnson, 2002). It is a systematic and orderly way for teachers to observe their practice or to explore a problem and a possible course of action. Action research is also a type of inquiry that is preplanned, organized, and can be shared with others” (Johnson, 2003).
Five Primary Steps

• 1) ask a question; identify a problem; define an area of exploration.
• 2) decide what data should be collected; how it should be collected and how often.
• 3) collect and analyze data
• 4) describe how the findings can be used and applied
  – Create action plan based on what you found.
• 5) Report or share your findings and plan for action.
The Process

1) Identify a problem or research topic
   - Decide what to study
   - Something that intrigues you, something that you really want to look at in-depth.
The Process (cont.)

2) Set the problem or research topic in a theoretical context

- Relate your topic to current thought in the field
  - This gives your project credibility
  - Enables you to link theory and practice by connecting what you find in the literature
    » Literature review
The Process (cont.)

• 3) Make a plan for data collection
  – This is known as the *methodology*
  – What data are you going to look at
  – How are you going to collect it and how often
  – All of this must be determined before the research begins.
The Process (cont.)

4) Begin to collect and analyze data
   – Identify the data to collect
   – As you collect the data, analyze it and look for themes, patterns, etc.
     • This analysis might influence further data collection by helping you to know what to look for.
The Process (cont.)

5) Continue to look at and refine the question and/or problem
   - Action research is a dynamic process.
   - If you are influenced by the literature search and data collection, do not hesitate to adjust the design.
The Process (cont.)

6) Analyze and organize the data
   – Qualitative
   – Quantitative
The Process (cont.)

7) Report the data
   – How will you present the facts
   – Objective report of what you found
The Process (cont.)

- 8) Make your conclusions and recommendations
  - Interpret the data – what does it mean
  - Conclusions
  - Answer your research question(s)
  - Make suggestions for “action” to be taken
  - Relate it to the literature review
    - Did what you find agree with or disagree with what the literature says.
The Process (cont.)

9) Create a plan of action
   - Based on what you found and concluded...what will you do...create an action plan.
The 9 Descriptors of Action Research

1) Action Research is systematic.
   - Planned methodical observation related to one’s teaching.

2) You do not start with an answer.
   - unbiased, objective observer.

3) It does not have to be complicated or elaborate to be rigorous or effective.

4) must be a well planned study before you start to collect data.
The 9 Descriptors of Action Research (cont).

5) Action Research projects vary in length.
   - Length is determined by your question, nature of your inquiry, research environment, and parameters of your data collection.

6) Observations should be regular, but they do not have to be long.

7) Action research projects exist on a continuum from simple and informal to detailed and very formal.

8) Action research is sometime grounded in theory.
   - Relate project to existing theory

9) Action research is not necessarily a quantitative study.
   - The goal is to understand a situation and/or phenomena
Five Possible Outcomes of Action Research

1) A greater understanding of a particular situation, student, or students in general.

2) The discovery of a problem.

3) A plan, program, instructional strategy and/or pedagogical method is found to be effective.

4) A plan, program, instructional strategy and/or pedagogical method is found to need modification.

5) A plan, program, instructional strategy and/or pedagogical method is found to be ineffective.
Finding your Research Topic

• Four common research areas:
  – Study and/or evaluate an administrative approach and/or practice.
    • Determine the effectiveness of a current administrative practice.
  – Study and/or evaluate a teaching method
    • Determine the effectiveness of a current or new teaching method/technique.
  – Identify and investigate a problem specific to your educational environment
    • Study a particular problem area in order to better understand what is happening and the possible causes of the problem.
  – Examine an area of interest
    • What interests you? Are you curious about some specific phenomena?
5 steps to getting started:

1. “Clarify the purposes of your research.

2. Attend to administrative and logistical aspects of your study.

3. Decide on a quantitative and/or qualitative approach.

4. Select a method and type of research.

5. Choose a design that is appropriate for the area of investigation” (Glanz, 2003, pgs. 54 & 58).
References
