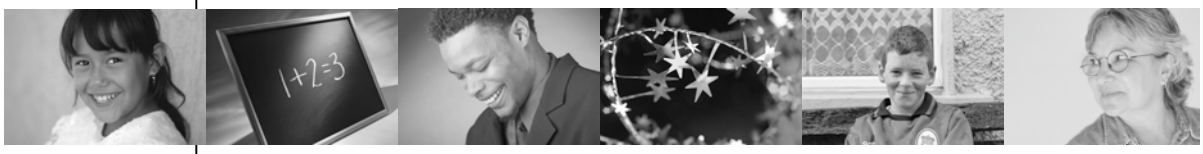
Leading Action Research in Schools



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Leading Action Research in Schools

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Leading Action Research in Schools

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This guide is dedicated to all of the administrators, teachers, and professional developers in the state of Florida who have provided invaluable information about this process and who have celebrated their positive and improved student results.

P R E F A C E

Leading Action Research in Schools provides guidelines for leading and facilitating action research in schools. It is intended to provide administrators with seven guidelines to consider when facilitating action research in their schools. In addition, specific planning forms and feedback forms are provided to facilitate action research in schools.

This guide was written by administrators for other administrators in Florida who are facilitating the participation of action research by teachers in their schools in conjunction with their individual professional development plans and follow-up and evaluation to effective professional development aligned to the Florida Professional Development Protocol.

In addition to *Leading Action Research in Schools*, Project CENTRAL has also created the following resources focusing on the topic of action research:

- *Improving Student Learning through Classroom Action Research: A Guide to Becoming an Action Researcher*, a teacher's guide
- online module
- video and CD
- Online Action Research Journal (case studies and examples).

For further information on the action research process, it is recommended to order and read *Improving Student Learning through Classroom Action Research: A Guide to Becoming an Action Researcher*.

Please visit the website at http://reach.ucf.edu/~CENTRAL to obtain more information about professional development resources.

Leading Action Research in Schools

Introduction

Throughout the nation, teachers and administrators are being challenged to collaboratively investigate the effectiveness of research-based instructional practices currently used in classrooms to improve student learning. Current accountability mandates, such as those through the No Child Left Behind legislation, highlight the goals of high-quality implementation of research-based instructional practices and techniques to ensure success for all students. Teachers are encouraged to reflect on and analyze student data on a consistent and collaborative basis to ensure success for all students. In order to meet the challenges being faced, schools are encouraged to restructure their professional development system providing faculty members with opportunities for collaborative inquiry, reflection, and dialogue what is driven by student data.

Action research is a model of professional development that promotes collaborative inquiry, reflection, and dialogue. "Within the action research process, educators study student learning related to their own teaching. It is a process that allows educators to learn about their own instructional practices and to continue to monitor improved student learning" (Rawlinson & Little, 2004). "The idea of action research is that educational problems and issues are best identified and investigated where the action is: at the classroom and school level. By integrating research into these settings and engaging those who work at this level in research activities, findings can be applied immediately and problems solved more quickly" (Guskey, 2000).

Therefore action research is a continuous and reflective process where educators make

instructional decisions in their classrooms based on student needs reflected by classroom data. The action research process involves four phases:

1. identifying a classroom problem
2. developing and implementing an action research plan
3. collecting and analyzing data
4. using and sharing results.

Action research provides teachers and administrators with an opportunity to better understand what happens in their school. This process establishes a decision-making cycle that guides instructional planning for the school and individual classrooms. Creating the need for research and establishing an environment for conducting classroom action research is the responsibility of a school administrator. A principal's support of any new initiative is crucial in order for the practice to be sustained and impact student learning.

This support is ongoing as the principal should ensure the following components are established to promote an effective learning environment for their faculty:

- provide sufficient and consistent opportunities in the school day for collaborative action research (studying, analyzing student work, dialoguing collaboratively, and analyzing student data to make instructional decisions)
- build a support system for teachers through a coach or a knowledgeable person(s) of the action research process, student learning, and instructional practices
- set high expectations for faculty and students
- create a professional library housing professional literature, assessment tools, and other instructional resources for faculty
- plan several sharing sessions for faculty to present their action research and findings throughout the year
- encourage all faculty to participate, including the principal and assistant principals.

The support for continuous learning of all within the school is the most important task of the leadership within a school. Trust and collaboration are critical components of a school that seeks to embark on problem-solving instructional dilemmas through action research. Once a climate of mutual trust and support has been established, the administrators continue to support this critical process of action research through their knowledge, organization and management, and continuous alignment and support of teachers throughout the action research process.

Within the action research process, teachers may choose to focus their study on one student, a small group of students, a class or several classes, or a whole school. The focus and level of participation among school and district colleagues depends on the level of support, needs, and interests of the teacher(s) and school. Emily Calhoun (1993) described three approaches to action research: individual teacher research, collaborative action research, and school-wide action research. Even though the environments are different, the process of action research remains the same. This process uses data to identify classroom/school problems, creates and implements a plan of action, collects and analyzes data, uses and shares the results, and makes instructional decisions to improve student learning continuously.

Individual teacher research focuses on studying a problem or issue within a single classroom. The teacher who engages in individual teacher research may or may not have support from colleagues and administration to share, brainstorm, and discuss the topic of action research. Although just one teacher may become directly involved in action research, support from knowledgeable educators at the school or district site is still important for successful teacher research to occur. Also, universities, educational agencies, and districts may encourage teacher action research by providing ongoing professional development related to the needs of the individual teacher researcher. These resources may also provide different venues for sharing the successes of the action research.

Collaborative action research focuses on studying a problem or issue within one or more classrooms. Teachers may collaborate and work together to study a particular problem in many different ways.

- co-teachers in one classroom studying a specific group of students
- a team of teachers focusing on a grade level issue
- a teacher and district, educational agency, or university personnel learning and studying a particular instructional practice
- a group of teachers in the same school studying the same instructional concern.

This collaborative action research approach fosters a joint effort because more than one teacher is involved in a specific area of study. Opportunities for sharing and dialogue are more likely to occur.

School-wide action research is a school reform initiative. Every faculty member of the school is involved in studying a specific issue identified from school data. This approach requires a great deal of support from the administrators and lead teachers/personnel, but the results can lead to school-wide change. Successful school-wide action research is directly related to initiatives contained within the school improvement plan.

Please refer to the chart on the following page to read examples of research questions that were studied using the different approaches of action research.

Different Approaches to Action Research

Approaches	Level of Focus	Level of Participation	Example of Research Question
Individual	Single classroom	Individual teacher	1. What impact can daily phonemic awareness activities have on my kindergarten students' oral language development? (*kindergarten teacher*) 2. How can using concrete objects (manipulatives) improve my students' ability to identify and extend patterns in mathematics? (*third grade teacher)*
Collaborative	One or more classrooms	Co-Teachers, teams, departments, educational agencies & teachers, university faculty & teachers, teachers within a district, etc.	1. How can students with disabilities experiencing deficits in phonemic awareness show improvement in those skills by participating in additional and intensive instruction in phonemic awareness activities at least four times per week? How will it affect their overall reading ability? *(exceptional student education (ESE) teacher & literacy coach)* 2. How can implementing "Organizing Together," a Strategic Instruction Model curriculum, improve students' abilities to come to class organized and prepared? (*grade 6 teachers in a middle school team*)
School-Wide	School-Improvement	Whole faculty	1. How can we teach our students to organize, analyze, synthesize, and interpret what they read? (*school-wide question*) • How can modeling through read-alouds improve students' abilities to organize, analyze, synthesize, and interpret what they read? • There are several action research teams within the school. The above example is one question being studied by one action research team. *2.* How can implementing a school-wide positive behavior support program improve students' safety and increase appropriate student behaviors within the school? *(all faculty)*

Seven topics are discussed in this booklet as guidelines to ponder when considering implementing action research as an individual, collaborative, or school-wide process.

Guideline 1: Build Knowledge of the Action Research Process

Information is the critical ingredient when implementing a new process that could change the formal learning of the instructional staff. The principal's role is to generate interest in the action research process by expressing the need through essential questions on student and teacher learning. The principal should pose the following questions during team meetings, individual teacher planning conferences, and with members of the school advisory committee:

- *Based on school and classroom data, what do students need to learn in order to achieve in school?*
- *What instructional practices are we implementing that have positive results on student learning?*
- *What instructional practices are we implementing that do not have positive results on student learning?*
- *What do we (faculty) need to know or learn in order to ensure our students achieve their learning goals? What instructional practices or techniques should we investigate and research?*
- *How are we going to learn about these instructional practices and ensure student impact?*
- *How will we know that students are achieving their academic and behavioral goals?*

It is important that the principal develop an understanding of action research to become proficient in explaining the impact of classroom research on student learning and teacher

professional growth. Participating in professional development and reading literature on action research builds a base of knowledge for the principal that makes it possible to respond to questions and work with teachers as they implement the phases of the action research process. (See resources and reading log in appendix.) The commitment of time will result in a new depth of knowledge about action research that can only reflect in the continued support of teachers.

Teachers are required to plan and implement a professional development plan aligned with the Florida Department of Education Professional Development System Evaluation Protocol. The protocol outlines the criteria for successful professional development plans, including participating in professional development that is directly related to improving the skills and knowledge used in the classroom. Learning communities, such as those associated with action research implementation, are encouraged as part of professional development when they identify research-based programs and strategies, gather research and implement studies on instructional methods, and share the results with other faculty within the school setting. The Florida Department of Education Professional Development System Evaluation Protocol also requires sustained training of 15 or more hours spread across multiple days. Facilitation of action research in the classroom setting meets the criteria for quality professional development according to the state guidelines. It is designed to be related to specific student performance and supported by data, have clearly defined objectives, strive for specific measurable improvements in student performance, and have an evaluation component to determine the effectiveness of the plan.

Action research is continual professional development and provides a direct route to improving teaching and learning (Calhoun, 2002). Using the process to facilitate school-wide change offers the opportunity to transform the school's climate. Teachers and administrators work together to create a professional community in which all contribute to the plan. As the principal begins to investigate the practicality of implementing action research school-wide, the following questions should be addressed:

- What does the disaggregated classroom data reflect about student and teacher learning?
- What do teachers need to learn in order to impact specific student learning needs?
- How is the school going to support teacher learning to ensure student achievement?
- How will teachers and the school evaluate classroom instruction and professional learning? What evaluation tools will be used?
- How will teachers and the school use the information collected through the evaluation to make specific and targeted decisions regarding research-based instructional strategies?

Action research is a process in which teachers systematically investigate instructional practices and techniques in order to improve their teaching. The impact of a specific instructional practice on student learning is measured, and the results become the basis for educational planning and decision-making.

The principal can learn a great deal from the resources available to communicate effectively with teachers, other administrators and district staff, and parents. If there is a university in the area, consult with faculty to assist with professional development or mentoring of teachers or principals. As the principal guides the staff toward successful implementation, questions will continue to need answers and the level of understanding will continue to improve. It is important to be a risk-taker and demonstrate the what, why, and how of action research.

The following form can be used to record what is read and what main points will be useful in assisting teachers.

Principal's Reading Log

Resource	Main Points
"*A Passion for Action Research*" Teaching Exceptional Children Vol. 33, No. 2, pp. 26-32	
Becoming An Action Researcher To Improve Learning In Your Classroom Florida Department of Education Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services 2002	
Bennett, C. (1994). Promoting reflection through action research: What do teachers think? *Journal of Staff Development, 15*(1), 34-38.	
Calhoun, E. (2002). Action Research for School Improvement. Educational Leadership, 59(6), 18-24.	
Little, M.E. (2001). Successful school improvement using classroom-based research. *Florida Educational Leadership, 1*, 41-44.	
McKay, J.A. (1992). Professional development through action research. *Journal of Staff Development, 13*(1), 18-21.	

Miller, D. & Pine, G. (1990). Advancing professional inquiry for educational improvement through action research. *Journal of Staff Development, 11*(3), 56-61.	
Sagor, R. (2000). Guiding School Improvement with Action Research. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Alexandra, VA, 22311 http://www.ascd.org	

Guideline 2: Understand the Benefits of Action Research

Action research is a teaching, learning, and decision-making process that can be used in a myriad of ways to assist the learning process of students and teachers.

- Action research is a means of improving student achievement through more effective teaching and administration of schools (Cohen & Manion, 1980; Elliot, 1991; Kemmis, 1981; Stenhouse, 1975).
- Educators involved in action research became more flexible in their thinking, more open to new ideas, and more able to solve new problems (Pine, 1981).
- Engaging in action research influenced teachers' thinking skills, sense of efficacy, willingness to communicate with colleagues, and attitudes toward professional development and the process of change (Simmons, 1985).
- Teachers engaged in action research depended more on themselves as decision makers and gained more confidence in what they believed about curriculum and instruction (Strickland, 1988).
- Action researchers were reading, discussing, thinking, and assessing ideas from related research with expanded analytical skills (Simmons, 1985).

Positive changes occur in the school environment through the action research process. Teachers become lifelong learners, and students experience success in learning. It is important to realize the benefits and purposes of action research, specifically in relation to the current professional demands and responsibilities in Florida. Aligning this process with the Florida Professional Development Protocol, the teachers' individual professional development plan, the school improvement plan, and other school and district reports and responsibilities are very important when establishing rationale and use for this process by teachers and others within the school community.

List additional benefits for _____School.

Guideline 3: Identify and Address Implementation Issues

School environments are varied and approach new learning methodologies in a multitude of ways. Preparation and planning to address the potential barriers to new learning is important to successful implementation. The following list of issues to discuss to facilitate effective implementation of action research includes:

- Action research may be viewed as a tool for gaining support for one instructional practice over another.

- Action research may be viewed as a way to document support for a proposed initiative.
- Action research requires time to collaborate.
- Some teachers are confident in their own abilities and do not feel the need to conduct formal action research.
- When the term "action research" is discussed, the definitions and applications are numerous and varied.
- Individual teachers' comfort levels with seeking outside support and assistance can be an obstacle to action research.

As with virtually all school improvement initiatives, active administrator support is a key to success of action research. Understanding issues and guiding discussions on solutions is crucial for the principal so a culture develops where action research can be successful. Knowledge about action research, explicitly stated goals and rationale, and support throughout the implementation of action research are critical to its success. Specific issues, both real and perceived, must be identified and addressed at the outset of this process and throughout its implementation.

List additional barriers for _____ School.

Issues to Address	Suggested Solutions

Guideline 4: Develop Goals That Include Action Research

The additional guidelines and resources provided in this booklet are suggestions to guide the continued implementation of data-based instructional decision-making through classroom action research. The basis of the school improvement plan is student data. The quality of goals, strategies, and objectives of the school's vision and school improvement plan is measured by the achievement of those goals, strategies, and objectives by all of the students in the school. Achieving these goals is directly related to the high quality implementation of research-based instructional practices, methods, and strategies by each individual teacher in the school. This is the foundation for the school to investigate the quality instruction that must take place if student learning is to improve. If the school's vision is "every child can learn and achieve," it is important to be able to support the teaching practices that are used to make this belief happen. Action research provides that support by verifying successful investigations. The principal discusses with the staff and community the importance of researching what teachers think will create learning opportunities for the students. Using the benefits of action research (guideline 2) is an excellent way to lead this discussion.

Once improved student learning through continuous progress monitoring has become a part of the implementation of the school's vision, it is straightforward to incorporate action research as a process to measure the established instructional goals. For example, a goal could be, "Successful learning experiences will be provided for every child each day through instructional practices that have been researched by the classroom teachers." This goal lays the foundation for individual action research plans to be implemented by teachers based on classroom and student needs.

Goals are incorporated into the school improvement plan and action plans are written to ensure the goals are met. As a part of action plans, include professional development and support during implementation of the action research process. The goals created in the school

improvement plan reflect what needs to happen so that all students can achieve the required state standards.

Guideline 5: Establish a Support System for Teachers

The premise of conducting action research is to provide feedback of student learning as a result of instruction. Action research is conducted to identify specific factors that cause students to improve their performance and achieve greater gains in applied learning. The principal facilitates the process and resulting accomplishments of action research. Teachers will need a support system as they conduct action research. A thorough plan of follow-up opportunities and support should be developed and expressed to all instructional staff.

- Create a team that will participate in additional professional development in order to scaffold and facilitate teachers as they conduct action research. This team can be made up of resource teachers, subject/grade level chairpersons, district staff, state agency representatives, and/or university professors.
- Investigate and disseminate information on conferences, seminars, and resources to enhance the continued learning and support of the established instructional initiatives.
- Review action plans in the school improvement plan to align action research to ensure that resources will be available.
- Develop a calendar of dates and times that assistance, dialogue, and sharing will be available to teachers facilitated by a support team and/or principal.

  Example: On scheduled days for professional development, the support team can facilitate teachers in collaborative dialogue providing teachers with opportunities to reflect on their action research and receive guidance or suggestions from their colleagues and support team.

- In the staff newsletters, assign a section to communicate action research tips to consider, questions and answers, testimonials, examples, resources, and grant information.
- Classroom observations should be linked to the teacher's action research study.

Guideline 6: Provide Professional Development in Action Research

To conduct action research successfully, a professional development plan at the school level should be developed, implemented, and sustained to provide teachers with opportunities to develop a knowledge base of action research. In addition, opportunities to dialogue, problem-solve, offer support, and share action research studies are critical during implementation. This plan of professional development should be supported and maintained by the support team and administrator. The action research process is in alignment with the Florida Professional Development Evaluation Protocol System, enacted to ensure student impact related to teacher professional development and classroom implementation. In addition, the need for teachers to document improved student learning outcomes is also part of the requirement of the teacher's Individual Professional Development Plans. Making these connections through professional development is very important to the rationale, benefits, and support for the action research process in the school and the classrooms.

Therefore, for most teachers, conducting action research changes how a teacher looks at instructional practices and their own professional development. This action research process clearly delineates the relationship between teaching and student learning. It is no longer enough that teaching occurs, but the results of the student learning are the critical factor.

Many resources are available on action research, such as articles, books, videos, etc. However, professional development involving continuous follow-up is a productive method for giving teachers the opportunity to learn about the process, engage in collaborative

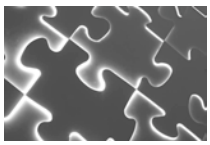
dialogue about student learning and instruction, study instructional practices and methodologies, look at student work to guide the process, and trouble shoot specific problems or issues.

The principal should actively participate in the professional development that is planned and delivered at the school. Remember, it is important for the administrator to demonstrate not only knowledge but also support of the teachers' action research continuously. When the principal models an understanding of the process and is actively involved in the professional development of teachers, positive attitudes can be maintained and strengthened.

As the principal and teachers assess the school's climate and needs, individuals probably will gain an insight into an area that they would like to investigate. As teachers participate in discussions, they are more likely to conduct action research if the principal demonstrates an understanding and support of the research process.

Clearly, the principal must establish the environment in which action research is viewed as a systematic process that affords greater opportunity for each teacher to direct his or her own professional growth. In this context, action research is a direct route to advance professional inquiry and help teachers become lifelong learners of instructional methods and strategies. The emphasis is on application and its impact on identified measurable outcomes.
The knowledge of the action research process that the principal demonstrates through discussions, presentations, and classroom observations is critical to the high quality implementation of data-based instructional decision-making in every classroom.

As mentioned, it is important for the principal to align professional development and action research to teachers' individual professional development plans. It is also important to communicate to teachers that action research is a process related to their individual professional development plans and the Florida Professional Development Evaluation Protocol System.



Guideline 7: Provide Opportunities for Collaboration

Principals know that teachers learn not only by themselves but also by working with others. Teachers need to work together to plan what instructional practices and techniques need to be implemented, what changes can occur, and how to evaluate their instruction. The more teachers learn, the more likely they will think of changes to implement to enhance student learning.

Teachers must look at action research and ask

- What do we want our students to achieve related to the curriculum standards and student needs?
- Which instructional practices and techniques are we using which have a research base?
- What instructional practices, programs, and materials should we investigate to verify the effects on student learning?
- How will we know that all students are mastering the established goals and objectives?

Perhaps the very best efforts toward implementing action research are to start small and work in a group. Beginning small and working collaboratively will provide support as well as demonstrate for other teachers the positive effects of action research. The principal and interested teachers work together in a very open relationship. It is important that there are trusting, collaborative relationships in the school. Participation inspires the trust that permits a wide range of constructive behaviors–sharing, suggesting, studying, observing, demonstrating, learning, and changing.

There must be time for collaboration. The principal establishes not only high expectations about action research but also the time for teachers to complete tasks.

- Set specific times on the school calendar for action research.
- Establish guidelines for professional development to include action research.

- Create schedules so teachers can visit classrooms of colleagues conducting action research on the same topic.
- Cover classes for teachers to collaborate on action research.

To encourage the inclusion of collaboration for all teachers, the action research process can be the foundation of a school-wide professional development plan for the school year. Each teacher could be required to conduct action research individually or collaboratively.

- Professional development would be devoted to learning how to conduct action research, studying student learning and instruction, monitoring student learning, and dialoguing and sharing teachers' experiences with action research during the year.
- Designated days could be scheduled during teachers' planning periods to ask for specific assistance from the support team.

If individual or school-wide action research is to take place, the principal must provide opportunities for communication and learning. A few suggestions that make these opportunities successful are listed below.

- Establish school-wide student-learning goals.
- Provide time for action research groups to meet during the workday.
- Support all ideas that are generated through discussions.
- Provide release time to visit colleagues' classrooms.
- Provide resources to enhance discussions.
- Provide sessions to share successful action research with staff.
- Provide a suggestion box in the office for ways to improve the action research process within the school.

Some teachers may need more guidance through the action research process or may not be ready to conduct action research. If teachers are experiencing frustration and have difficulties successfully conducting action research, they should be encouraged to develop a professional growth plan that will support their abilities for improvement.

The action research design allows teachers to be successful or unsuccessful in achieving their desired outcomes. This is positive in that teachers can learn what does not work and can make professional decisions about promoting student learning.

Summary

In summary, one of the most productive outcomes of effective, instructional leadership is that the principal provides ongoing growth and improvement opportunities. Through the series of guidelines discussed throughout this booklet, the principal guides the teachers to establish the need and the desire to conduct action research in their classrooms. As with virtually all school improvement initiatives, active administrative support is a key to the success of action research. It is crucial that administrators build a culture that promotes inquiry while nurturing teachers in risk-taking research efforts. As a result, principals provide more instructional leadership and specific professional development opportunities.

Action research will happen if the principal follows these guidelines.

Guidelines	Accomplished	Date
1. Build knowledge of the action research process		
2. Understand the benefits of action research.		
3. Consider and work through the barriers of action research.		
4. Develop goals that include action research		
5. Establish a support system for teachers.		

6. Provide action research professional development.		
7. Provide opportunities for teacher collaboration.		

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Memorandum

TO: **All Instructional Staff**

FROM: **_____, Principal**

SUBJECT: **Self-Study Options**

The following is a comparison of the Professional Development Plan and the Action Research Design. Please review this information and pick one of the two for next year. Indicate your choice below.

Professional Development Plan	**Action Research Project**
Pre-Conference	Pre-Conference
1. Student Performance Need Areas 2. Professional Development Activities 3. Professional Development Objectives 4. Expected Student Outcomes 5. Student Performance Outcomes	1. Define the Problem 2. Implementation Design 3. Specific Goal of Implementation 4. Measurement Design/Data Sources 5. Observations/Insights/Student Data
Documentation	Documentation
Post-Conference	Post-Conference

Return this form by _____**.** If you have any questions, please schedule an appointment.

Name: _____

Grade/Subject: _____

Here are some questions to consider before proposing your topic and selecting your option.

1. Does your topic support the school improvement plan?
2. Is this a topic in which you want to increase your knowledge?
3. Is your topic measurable?
4. Will your study improve student learning?
5. Does your topic reflect test results?
6. Does your topic support what you want to achieve?

Which process will you use next year? (circle one) PDP ARPs

PROPOSED TOPIC:

_____

Principal's Reading Log

Resource	Main Points

Reflective Study Groups: Guide 1

Rubin, H. (2002). *Collaborative Leadership: Developing Effective Partnerships in Communities and Schools*. Corwin Press, Inc. Thousand Oaks, California

Reflective Questions/Issues to Consider

Chapter 1

- Reflect on an idea or plan that you tried to implement in the past but was not as successful as you had anticipated.
- In hindsight, what are some changes you could have made to enhance collaboration and possibly increased the success of the plan?
- Rubin refers to leaders of non-profit and public education as "keepers of the social mission." How would you apply this definition to your present position?

Chapter 2

- Reflect on a time when you felt as if you were "pushing string." In that situation, what might you have done to get others more actively engaged?
- Rubin states, "The construct of collaboration versus competition is a false dichotomy." In your opinion, how do the two premises work together in tandem?

Chapter 3

- Having read Rubin's working definitions of key vocabulary, how do you define your own personal role as a "collaborative leader" within the context of your position or project?
- Discuss the benefits of both itinerant and sustained collaborations. Share examples of both types that you have implemented in your setting.

Chapter 4

- Rubin states, "All grownups remember the quality of their relationships with the tones and attitudes of their favorite teacher(s) much more than the topics the teacher(s) covered in class."
- Reflect on the qualities of your favorite teacher. Are they qualities that you feel are emulated in a "collaborative leader?"
- Rubin also states, "The effective leaders of the 21st century will be *superintendents of education* not *superintendents of schools*." Reflect and discuss the meaning of his statement.

Chapter 5

- Seven quality principles of system alignment are discussed. Share the benefits of applying these specific principles to current school projects and initiatives.

Chapter 6

- Rubin suggests a framework for system alignment through collaboration on page 50. Discuss how each of the different quality principles aligns with the phases of collaborations life cycle within the context of a current or upcoming project.

Chapter 7

- After reading through the 24 dimensions of effective collaborations, reflect on your own personal style as a collaborative leader. Which three areas represent your top strengths? Which three areas represent your weakest areas?
- Reflect on specific ideas that would help you build your skills in the weaker areas.

Chapter 8 & 9

- Reflect on the framework and the seven principles to effective collaborative leadership. Choose one of more areas of the framework to improve through action to build stronger, more collaborative relationships.
- Use your action plan to build your own skills as a collaborative leader!

Reflective Study Groups: Guide 2

Dana, N. F., & Yendol-Silva, D. (2003). *The reflective educator's guide to classroom research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Dana and Yendol-Silva offer an in-depth study of action research and the process that it envelopes. By understanding its historical foundations, the theory behind the practice, and its many definitions and approaches, teachers will be better equipped to approach the process of teacher inquiry on their own. Armed with explanations, examples, and reflections, the guide is an excellent foray for teachers going into classroom research. It applies well to individual, collaborative, or school-wide approaches.

Reflective Questions for Study Groups

Chapter 1: Teacher Inquiry Defined

1. How do I define teacher inquiry in terms of my classroom?
2. How can this process of teacher inquiry help me in my daily work?
3. How can it help me in my short term planning?
4. How can it help me in my long term planning?
5. How will this help me be a better teacher?

Chapter 2: The Start of Your Journey: Finding a Wondering

This chapter also includes passion exercises in engage in to help you find your focus. Work through these exercises and bring them to the table when the study groups meet.

1. Share the general or broader ideas that interest the group in terms of what you would like to pursue.
2. Make a list of the issues or problems that come to mind in your classroom today. Think about each student and any difficulties they may be experiencing. Include everything that comes to mind.
3. Discuss your lists together. How many have similar issues? Did others think of issues that you missed? This is a good time to find a partner or partners to collaborate more closely with on a specific issue if you would like.
4. Share the resources that you found during the passion exercises.
5. Decide which area you would like to focus on first, either individually or as part of a group.

Chapter 3: To Collaborate or Not to Collaborate: That Is the Question!

1. Reflect and discuss.
    - Why is it important to collaborate?
    - What are some of the benefits of collaboration?
    - What are some of the difficulties of collaboration?

2. Discuss the four collaborative structures: shared inquiry, parallel inquiry, intersecting inquiry, and inquiry support.
    - Which one appeals to you? Why?
    - How can you work as a group to offer each individual professional support through their inquiry?

Chapter 4: Developing a Research Plan: Making Inquiry a Part of Your Teaching Practice

1. Chapter 4 also offers exercises in methods of data collection. After doing the exercises, share the different methods of data collection that appeal to you. Give practical examples of how you will collect the data in your classroom.
2. After writing your inquiry brief, share with the group what the purpose of your inquiry will be. State the research question explicitly. Give feedback: Is it measurable? Is it focused? Offer suggestions for fine-tuning the question. Remember that it may change over time and does not have to be "perfect" at this time.

Chapter 5: Finding Your Findings: Data Analysis

For group reflection after doing the exercises in the chapter

1. What did you set out to explore?
2. How did you do that? What methods did you use?
3. What were the results? Were they what you expected? If not, why do you think you got the results that you did?
4. Do you need to change a strategy or method? How do you think this will help?
5. What are the implications of your action research study?

Chapter 6: Extending Your Learning: The Inquiry Write-Up.

Reflect and discuss.

1. Why is it important to write up the concluding report on your study?
2. What are the benefits?
3. What are the challenges of writing?
4. How can we overcome the challenges?

While writing a draft of your inquiry write-up, share each component with the group for feedback and discussion. Offer support and constructive criticism to your colleagues.

Chapter 7: The End of Your Journey: Making Your Inquiry Public.

Reflect and discuss.

1. Why is it important to share our results with others?
2. Who is the potential audience for my particular inquiry question?
3. What are the different ways that I/we can share our results?
4. What is our plan for sharing the results of our group?

Reflective Study Groups: Guide 3

Sagor, R. (1992). *How to Conduct Collaborative Research.* Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development. Alexandria, VA.

A guide for approaching action research in collaborative roles, this publication leads the reader from the first approach to collaboration in an AR project throughout the cycle. It offers a more in-depth look at data collection. Sagor also offers provides explanation for different data analysis tools and discusses the importance of maintaining validity and reliability throughout the action research process. In order for action research to serve the education community, it is important for results to be reported in some form. Sagor offers several suggestions for sharing the invaluable research gained from action research projects.

Discussion Questions for Reflection in Study Groups

Chapter 1. What do we (individually and collectively) hope to gain from our venture into collaborative action research?

Chapter 2. As we approach this process, how would we as a group define collaborative action research from our own perspective?

Chapter 3. After approaching the problem formulation steps according to Sagor's instructions, discuss the questions offered in the chapter openly in the group.
1. Is the research tied to what I have to do or want to do?
2. Is our research focused?
3. How involved do I want to be in this research project?
4. What will be the basis for team sharing?

Chapter 4. Remembering the importance of triangulation, which tools for data collection do we want to use? Who will be responsible? How can we share the responsibility?

Chapter 5. Looking over the data, brainstorm and discuss possible reasons for outcomes. Is it what we expected to find? Why or why not?

Chapter 6. How can we best share our results with our colleagues? Discuss several different venues for reporting results and reasons for reporting them.

Chapter 7. Looking at the outcome of our project, how can we use this information to promote positive change? Do we need to go back and change our interventions? Do we want to share with other teams our success and enlarge the scope of the project?

Chapter 8. Final reflection: What did we each like best about the project? What would we want to change on the next one? Discuss the successes and the surprises that were discovered along the journey.

Resources

Articles

Calhoun, E. (2002). Action Research for School Improvement. *Educational Leadership. 59(6),* 18-24.

Caro-Bruce, C., McCreadie, J. (1994). Establishing action research in one school district. In: Noffke, S. (1994). Practically critical: An invitation to action research in education. New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

Leh, A.S.C. (2002). Action research on the changing roles of the instructors and the learners. *TechTrends, 46* (5), 44-47.

Llorens, M. B. (1994). Action research: Are teachers finding their voice? *The Elementary School Journal, 95* (1), 3-10.

Raphael, R.E., Florio-Ruane, S., Kehus, M.J., George, M., Hasty, N.L., & Highfield, K. (2001). Thinking for ourselves: Literacy learning in a diverse teacher inquiry network. *Reading Teacher, 54* (6).

Websites

Action Research as a Framework for School Improvement
South Florida Center for Educators; Florida Atlantic University
http://www.coe.fau.edu/sfcel/default.htm
Florida Atlantic University's website for action research as a framework for school improvement offers information about action research in general, as well as projects that are specific to their region.

Action Research Module, John Hopkins University
http://www.sitesupport.org/actionresearch/
An on-line action research module developed by John Hopkins University, Baltimore City Public School System, Morgan State University, and the University of Maryland, this site offers innovative teacher training opportunities and professional development modules in this electronic learning community.

Action Research: The Education Alliance at Brown University
http://www.alliance.brown.edu/pubs/themes_ed/act_research.pdf
This link is to an on-line article about action research published by Brown University. It provides an overview of different definitions of action research and the various models. It offers in-depth answers to questions about data collection and the action research process. It also highlights a reflection by a teacher researcher's first attempt at pursuing action research.

An Introductory Guide to Teacher Candidates at Queen's University: Action Research Who? Why? How? So what?
http://educ.queensu.ca/projects/action_research/guide.htm
This website offers a quick introductory look at the basics of action research. It helps answer frequently asked questions and addresses concerns about the basic structure of doing action research. By answering the fundamental questions of who, what, why, where, and how, it gives a good overview for beginning researchers of what action research is and how to do it. Links are also provided for other resources and further exploration.

Educational Action Research: An international journal focusing on educational research and practice.
http://www.triangle.co.uk/ear/index.htm
This website highlights the journal, *Educational Action Research*, as a resource to those engaged in action research. It is a refereed international journal that publishes a wide range of action research studies and maintains a literature review.

Teacher Research: George Mason University
http://www.gse.gmu.edu/research/tr/index.shtml
This website by George Mason University's Graduate School of Education is an extensive site covering the basics of action research, the steps in the process, and discussion of data analysis and conclusions. It also offers a growing online archive of finished action research projects.

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