

R2 - About Action Research

A brief history

The invention of action research is generally attributed to social scientist Kurt Lewin in the 1940s. Lewin believed that careful, collaborative enquiry by practitioners was the best way of informing them as to how they might improve their practices: 'Action Research is a three-step spiral process of planning which involves reconnaissance or fact-finding; taking actions; and fact-finding about the results of the action.'

Action research also owes much to the tradition of reflective practice developed by Donald Schön in the 1980s. It was also much influenced by the work of Lawrence Stenhouse promoting the idea of teachers as researchers.

Action research now

Today action research in schools, sometimes referred to as 'teacher enquiry', is growing in popularity. It is increasingly seen as a systematic way of, among other things:

- ✓ **Improving teaching and learning**
- ✓ **Providing opportunities for professional development**
- ✓ **Acting as a catalyst for collaboration as part of a professional learning community**
- ✓ **Offering a focus for partnership between universities and schools/colleges**
- ✓ **Dealing with and initiating change, and**
- ✓ **Managing sustainable school improvement.**

When people use the term 'action research' they may mean slightly different things and consequently adopt different (but similar) approaches.

Whatever ends up being your version of action research it is likely to have these characteristics:

1. It will arise out of a genuine issue and a wish on your part to improve learner outcomes
2. It will involve you trying out something new (your 'action')
3. It will require you to notice carefully what happens (the 'research' element)
4. Your action research will provide you with some findings which you will write up and share with other colleagues
5. Often action research is a cyclical process, with findings leading into different, often deeper, questions!

You can find out more about Action Research by using the resources listed in R7 – Action Research Bibliography.