

What is the Action Research Process?

- Action research is a fluid process that is shaped by the thinking and experiences of the researcher. Still, there are clear benchmark steps that build upon each other. This section provides an overview of the phases of action research and useful tools to support initial planning.



ACTION RESEARCH: FIVE PHASES

- Why do you want to do it? Is it an important and practical problem, something worth your time and effort, something that could be beneficial to you, your students and others?

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

- Is the problem stated clearly and in the form of a question? Is it broad enough to allow for a range of insights and findings? Is it narrow enough to be manageable within your time frame and your daily work?

- Will you develop and implement a new strategy or approach to address your question? If so, what will it be?

PLAN OF ACTION

- Will you focus your study on existing practices? If so, which particular ones?

- What is an appropriate timeline for what you are trying to accomplish?

- What types of data should you try to collect in order to answer your question?

DATA COLLECTION

- How will you ensure that you have multiple perspectives?

- What resources exist and what information from others might be useful in helping you to frame your question, decide on types of data to collect, or to help you in interpreting your findings?

- What can you learn from the data? What patterns, insights, and new understandings can you find?

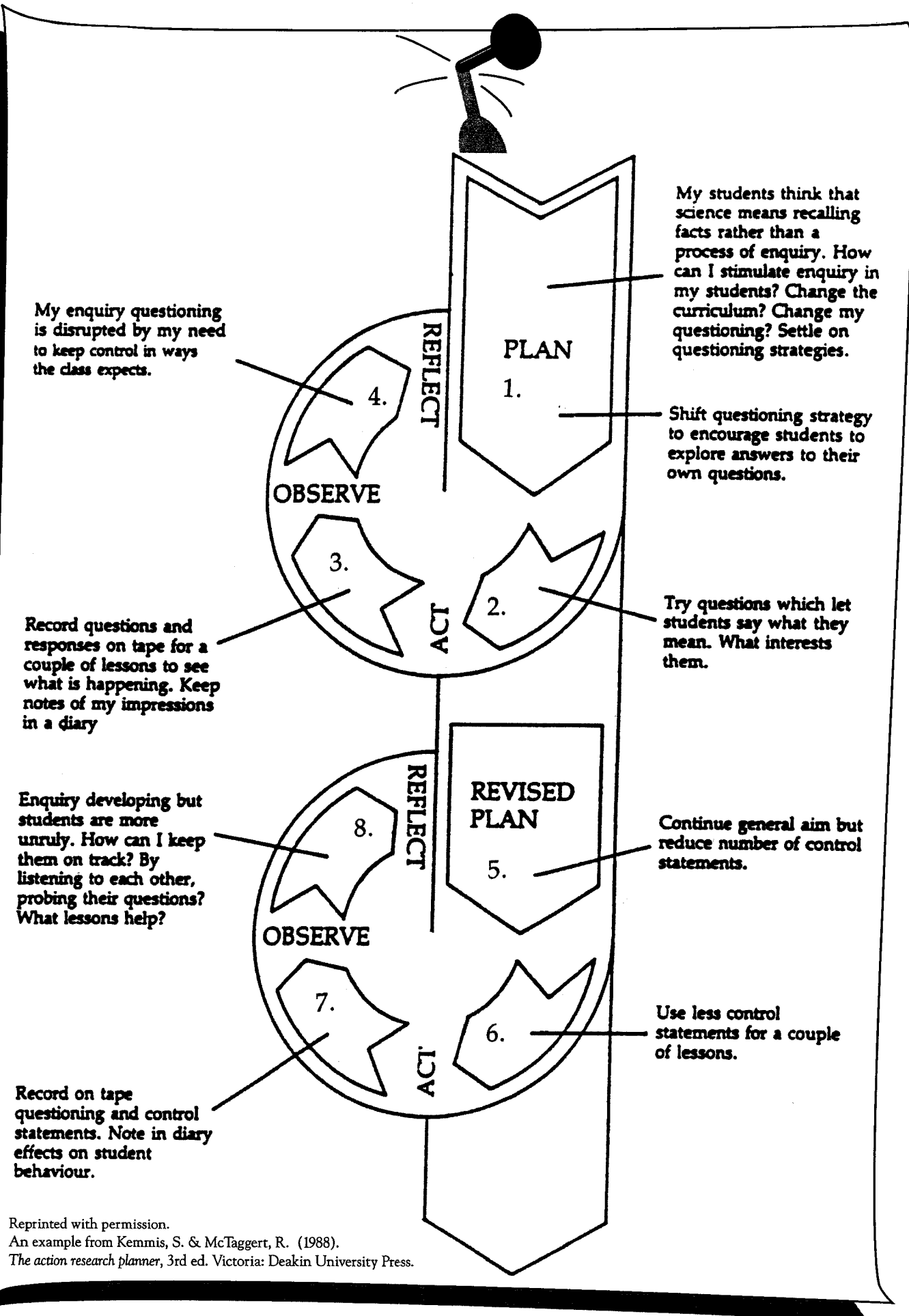
ANALYSIS OF DATA

- What meaning do these patterns, insights, and new understandings have for your practice? for your students?

- What will you do differently in your classroom as a result of this study?

PLAN FOR FUTURE ACTION

- What might you recommend to others?
- How will you write about what you have learned so that the findings will be useful to you and to others?



Action Research...Taking Action

(My reflections on what I did and what I learned)

Ginny Kester

THE HOW

Action Research as a Process

For the teacher, action research provides a model for questioning teaching practices. Inherent to this model are 1) the classroom is the laboratory; 2) the process is cyclical in nature; 3) the results should change or enhance teaching practices.

Action Research as a Forum

Monthly action research meetings provide a forum in which teachers can share their successes and failures. Since the focus is on the process, the input of peers becomes instrumental in the direction of the project. Teachers offer a variety of perspectives, and their suggestions give other participants tools with which they can further analyze their results.

THE WHAT

Began with the question of why African-American students lag behind. Why haven't teaching methods such as multicultural education or cooperative learning had a greater impact?



Led to an examination of what I consider the most important factor in any successes I had with students—my ability, because of the multiage house system in which I teach, to know my students and their families well. Therefore, my question became: How does school structure affect a student's sense of belonging? In turn, does this sense of belonging increase the student's desire to do well in school?



As my research progressed, my hypothesis that students in a multiage house system would feel a greater bond to the school appeared to be wrong. Length of time in the house system did not seem to have an appreciable effect on the achievement of students. Also, the bond students felt toward their peer group emerged as a significantly stronger force in positive student achievement.

THE HOW

Action Research as a Catalyst for School Change

Action research groups often bring teachers with different perspectives together. Great emphasis is placed on developing this learning community so that teachers can openly and honestly seek out solutions within their own schools to the problems they have identified.

THE WHAT

After talking with my group, I took another look at my findings. What emerged was a picture of students who have two powerful forces working on them—both their academic teacher and their peer group. The values promoted by each group often come into conflict with each other and have a profound effect on what goals students set for themselves. I concluded that for a school to be effective, it must provide opportunities for both individual academic success, as well as for success within the peer group.

Based on the findings of my action research project, an additional resource teaching position was created at my school. One responsibility I have in this position is to create programs for African-American students that address the needs of both the peer group and the academic classroom.

Actions

Peer Group:

- Videotape project in which a student interviewed African-American men in the community.
- Monthly award meetings at the neighborhood center where successes of a student in the area of community service and/or academic achievement are highlighted.
- Group project done by students living in the same neighborhood and focus on improving their attendance.

Academic Classroom:

- Emphasis to keep students in the classroom so that the teacher-student bond is enhanced. Programs for behavior and academic goals are designed to aid teacher and student.
- Weekly contact with parents of specific students. Periodic home visits to keep avenues of communication open.
- Neighborhood center program organized in response to findings of attendance project team. Emphasis is on reading and having teachers work at the neighborhood center.

Comments from Facilitators

It isn't until the spring of the year that it becomes clear to some participants what they really did. Then they go back and retrace their steps and say, "Oh yes, I was actually thinking about my question in a much broader way at the beginning of the year, but it was the result of some of my actions that kept me narrowing the focus throughout the year."

I do think it's a spiral—you have your question; you think about what you could do to gather information that would have an impact on your practice; next you go back and try to sort out what you learned; and then you try something new again.



ACTION RESEARCH PLANNING GUIDE

This process can be done as peer interviews. Group members can help each other formulate and clarify specific plans for action research projects.

The interviewer asks questions about each item in the guide and takes notes on the responses for the benefit of the researcher. The interviewer may use the probes on the form or replace them as seems comfortable and necessary.

It is helpful for the researcher to do some thinking about these areas prior to the peer interview. In many cases, the written action research plans are shared with the rest of the group for feedback.

The process and notes are confidential to members of the group.

The content of this *Action Research Planning Guide* has been strongly influenced by the work of John Elliott, David Hopkins, Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart.

Action Research Planning Guide

The process and the notes are confidential to members of the group.
Use a black pen and write clearly to save recopying before duplicating.

Researcher:

Interviewer:

Date:

1. General Idea, Question or Area of Concern

What is something about your practice you would like to change or find out more about? Why would this make a difference to you? What broad vision, standards or mission would this study serve?

NOTES:

- Use this form as the starting point for a peer interview.
- The interviewer asks the questions, adding other probes or elaborations as appropriate.
- The interviewer takes notes and passes them back to the researcher, who can then use them as a tool in formulating his/her specific action research plan.

Action Research Planning Guide

2. Background

Briefly describe the facts of the situation and any preliminary hypotheses that may help to explain the circumstances.

3. Action Plan

Are you planning to change the situation or find out more about it?

Action Research Planning Guide

4. What data do you plan to gather?

Include at least two data sources and/or co-researchers to ensure triangulation.

5. Resources

What materials, references, and assistance do you need to carry out the data gathering?
How will you get them?

6. Negotiations and Ethical Considerations

Who else do you need to talk or negotiate with in order to carry out this work? Are there any ethical or confidentiality considerations about the data to be gathered or about who will have access to it? Are any permissions needed?

Action Research Planning Guide

7. Rough Time Line

Outline a schedule for gathering data and making sense of it through analysis. Include in your time line an estimate of when you may be ready to start a second, third or fourth cycle of action research with a revised question, action plan, data to gather, resources needed and so forth.

8. Audiences

What are some potential audiences for what you learn from this study?

9. Sharing and Reporting

What specific report formats might be most appropriate for particular audiences?

NOTES:

- One of the great strengths of action research is that it is intended to be used by the researcher, by other members of the community, and by educators in similar circumstances.
- It is useful to consider, before you start, the potential audiences for your action research. These may include, in addition to yourself, students, parents and colleagues in your school, administrators and school board members, members of the local community, and educators in other communities.
- Formats for reporting and sharing will vary depending on the audience. They could include written reports, case studies, video or audio tapes, letters or articles in the newspaper, presentations to parents, other teachers or the school board, and so forth. It's important to have your audience and possible format for reporting in mind as you plan for the data you will gather.



Classroom Action Research Planning Calendar

September Begin exploring questions (perhaps not focused on one)
Gather preliminary data
Learn about the action research process
Begin writing about questions

October Focus on single question or topic
Gather more preliminary data
Reflect on data
Continue writing/documentation

November Write question in rough form
Develop clear ideas about data gathering strategies
Begin to analyze data
On-going reflection
Continue writing/documentation

December Implement a data gathering plan
Continue to analyze data and reflect on actions
Continue writing/documentation

January Continue data gathering
Continue to analyze data and reflect on actions
Continue writing/documentation

February Continue to analyze data and reflect on actions
Begin writing about findings

March Record findings
Reflect on findings
Write up first draft of findings

April Complete final report

May Share findings