

Action Research for Inservice Training

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Photo: Joe Di Dio, NEA.

Action research, with its emphasis on applied scientific inquiry, helps teachers develop the skills to analyze what's happening in their classrooms.

A glaring weakness of many inservice training programs is that they neglect the inquiry skills necessary for teachers to analyze profitably the "ecology" of their schools and classrooms. Being able to determine the reasons for what they do and the effects of their actions on classroom processes helps teachers make better use of research findings on teaching effectiveness.

A useful inservice framework that helps develop these skills is the action research model. Similar in some ways to the technical assistance model described in this issue by Trohanis and Jackson (see p. 386), action research includes one other step that makes it unique. In this model, research also takes place in the classroom. The basic premise is that formal research, tempered by practical, onsite experience is the key to improving educational performance.

Using Methods of Science

Formal research and scientific methods of inquiry are sometimes viewed as pursuits best left outside the day-to-day world of teaching. Action research assumes, on the contrary, that scientific inquiry is a valid and valuable tool that teachers, administrators, and support personnel can use to translate educational goals into specific methods for achieving them. As described by Stephen Corey (1954):

Action research in education is research undertaken by practitioners [in local school situations] in order that

they may improve their school practices. The people who actually teach children . . . attempt to solve their practical problems by using methods of science. They accumulate evidence to define their problems more sharply. They draw upon all of the experience available to them as a source for action hypotheses that give promise to ameliorate or eliminate the practical difficulties of their day to day work.

An important motivational factor of this approach is that teachers share in the responsibility for their professional improvement. As part of an ongoing teaching and learning process, they gain new insights into how children learn and how subjects should be taught. The model also calls for goals that are behavioral rather than academic. It represents, in fact, a new view of the classroom as being, when necessary, a laboratory for solving educational problems.

The Action Research Model

Action research relies on the collaborative efforts of teachers, supervisors, and researchers to improve learning environments. The latest variation on this concept to emerge is the Interactive Model developed at the Far West Laboratory (Tikunoff and Ward, 1979). Its guidelines are:

- *Stage one:* The supervisor helps teachers and other school personnel identify, clarify, and categorize problems in the class and school environment. This may involve the aid of a consultant, if necessary.

- *Stage two:* The supervisor assembles pertinent readings and project materials for use by school personnel involved in the problem. Here again, a consultant may prove necessary.

- *Stage three:* The teacher studies the material for solutions that may apply to the problem at hand. With the assistance of the supervisor and consultant, the teacher then forms a plan of action. Whether and how to modify the teacher's plan, or to develop alternative solutions, should be a cooperative decision.

- *Stage four:* This is the point at which onsite research occurs. The teacher's plan is evaluated for its classroom effectiveness based on data from observation, teacher reports, testing, or a combination of these. The supervisor and consultant should assist the teacher to assure that proper and effective verification techniques are employed.

- *Stage five:* In conjunction with the plan's implementation, the supervisor should provide ongoing review and support. Specific points of success and failure should be collaboratively noted and analyzed.

- *Stage six:* The final stage of the cycle is overall evaluation of the plan's success and a review of alternatives to bolster areas still deemed weak. In effect this may become the first stage of a new cycle leading to further refinements in solving the problem.

OFF TO A GOOD START...

Plan to attend the 1980 ASCD Annual Conference two days early in order to attend a National Curriculum Study Institute on Thursday and Friday, March 27-28. Topics are MIDDLE SCHOOLS and TEACHING STRATEGIES. Both institutes will be held at the Sheraton-Atlanta Hotel. To register, contact Jo Jones, Public Relations Manager, ASCD, 225 N. Washington Street, Alexandria, VA 22314, (703) 549-9110. Registration fee for ASCD members is \$110 and for non-members \$140.

In my view collaborative research along the lines of this model can be invaluable in sensibly and rationally applying new approaches to specific classroom problems. Its major benefit is to promote a continuing process of professional development, a climate in which teachers and other personnel not only pose the questions, but test their own solutions as well. *EL*

References

- Corey, S. "Action Research in Education." *Journal of Educational Research* 47 (January 1954): 147.
- Tikunoff, W., and B. Ward. "Partners: Teachers, Researchers, Trainer/Developers—An Interactive Approach to Teacher Education R & D." Paper presented at the International Conference on Exploring Issues in Teacher Education, Research and Development Center, the University of Texas at Austin, 1979.



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