Action Research in Family Learning

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What is action research (AR)?

- "A reflective process of progressive problem-solving that helps you to answer questions you have about issues in your program or practice. In a community of learners, practitioners decide their *own* questions & work collaboratively to find ways to improve their practice & programs." (Weirauch, p. 1)

- In AR, "we systematically analyze a problem, review the literature & relevant experience, set a baseline for purposes of comparative analysis, systematically gather evidence on observed change(s), & collectively reflect on the outcomes" (Quigley, 2006, p. 171)

- Research is not just for professors
  - "Poking & prying with a purpose"

Why use AR?

- Ethical
  - Educators participants have right & capacity to construct knowledge about own programs
  - "Practitioners & their learners can begin to voice their own realities through action research. They can begin to create & own their own knowledge for practical change & they can begin to build momentum for public & policy change with supportive data." (Quigley, 1999, p. 260)

- Pragmatic
  - Benefits for educators
    - Hone skills in problem-posing & problem-solving
    - Deepen knowledge about program & teaching practices
  - Improve program effectiveness
  - Gather evidence to document program outcomes
  - Stimulate change on multiple scales: AR "has the potential to influence—if not transform—the researcher, the research participants, their collective work or activities, the setting they are part of, & the culture they share." (Quigley, 1999, p. 257)

How does it work?

- Group of "critical friends"

- Iterative cycle of problem-posing and problem-solving

Figure 5.1 The Four Main Phases of Action research
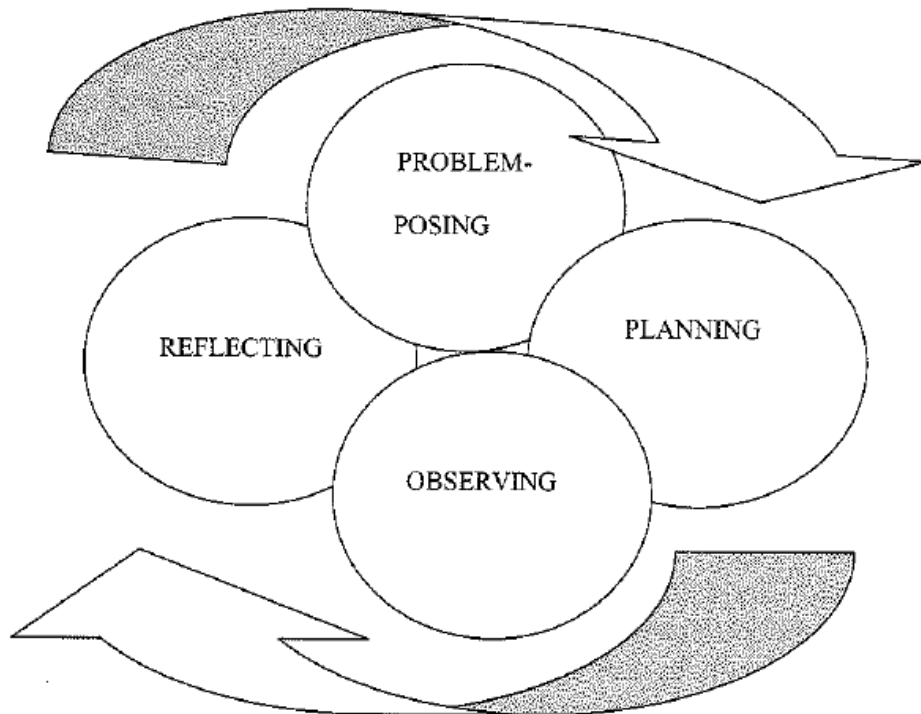
"The best way to understand something is to try to change it."
(Kurt Lewin)

(Quigley, 2006, p. 174)

Examples of AR in practice

- SEQUAL (Statewide Educational Quality for Family Literacy) – FL programs in PA (2007-2011)

  - Choose among pre-determined topics or identify their own

  - Question: "To what extent can we <u>increase the quality of parent-child interaction</u> as measured by the ACIRI tool through teaching basic literacy skills, increased focus on quality parenting education, implementation of the core messages, as well as the incorporation of the behaviors on the ACIRI tool?"

Planned Outcome	Intervention(s)	Data source(s)	Results
1. Raise test scores for parents & children on the PALS Test (phonological awareness literacy screening) Stakeholder: Families	September 2009 • Continue focusing on basic literacy skills for adults & children • Have parents & children practice ACIRI skills as part of ILA [interactive literacy activities] September 2010 Implement *Parenting for Academic Success: A Curriculum for Families Learning English*	May 2010 & May 2011 PALS scores for adults & children	2009-2010 Child Scores Average child PALS score increased (see handout) 2010-2011 Child Scores Average child PALS score increased (see handout) 2009-2010/2010-2011 Adult Scores Average adult PALS score increased

Planned Outcome	Intervention(s)	Data source(s)	Results
2. Improve the quality of time parents spend with their children both at home & at school Stakeholder: Families	September 2009 • Use ACIRI curriculum in classrooms • Have parents & children practice ACIRI skills as part of ILA March 2010 Use learning games as part of ILA & parenting education	ACIRI Test Parent journals – reflect on time spent at home & school with child on ACIRI lesson	2009-2010 • Adult & child average ACIRI scores increased (see handout) 2010-2011 • Adult & child average ACIRI scores increased (see handout) • Parent journal entries reflected the time they were spending with their children. They allowed the teachers to see how the parents were using knowledge that they were learning both during ILA & at home.

Planned Outcome	Intervention(s)	Data source(s)	Results
3. Focused parenting education will enhance the effectiveness of ILAs Stakeholder: Families	September 2009 Use ACIRI curriculum in classrooms March 2010 Use learning games as part of ILA & parenting education September 2010 Implement *Parenting for Academic Success* Use Early Learning Standards as a parent education tool	ACIRI Test Parent surveys & activities from *Parenting for Academic Success* ILA Portfolio ILA Observation Checklist	ACIRI scores increased Overall, parents reported on surveys that they enjoyed *Parenting for Academic Success* lessons & found them helpful ILA Portfolio documents parent-child interactions & activities done with the families Teachers documented the families' interactions during ILA through the year using the ILA observation checklist

Phases

- **#1: Problem-posing**

  - What is the problem, issue, or concern? What isn't working?

  - Identify intervention

    - What will you *do* to improve the problem?
    - Which actions will be most likely to produce the desired outcome?

  - Considerations
    - Feasibility
    - Justification

Phases

- **#2: Planning**
  - Timeline
  - Informed consent
  - Institutional approval
  - Resources
  - Data collection techniques
    - Use several types
    - Qualitative and/or quantitative
      - Survey questions
      - Standardized measures
      - Interviews
      - Focus groups
      - Observational notes
      - Video analysis
      - Photographic analysis
      - Document analysis

Phases

- Criteria for success (identify benchmarks)
  - How will you know if you have succeeded?
    - What were the *initial* patterns of behavior, knowledge, attitudes, etc., and how have they *changed*?
    - "What's different, and compared to what?" (Quigley, 2006, p. 181)
  - Surveys: pre-post, not retrospective

Type	When?	Example
retrospective	end of intervention	"I read to my child more often than I did before starting the class." • yes/no; "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree"
pre-post	T 1: *before* it begins T 2: *after* it ends	"How often do you read to your child each week?" • "never" to "every day"

Phases

- Craft a researchable question
  - Focused, specific, & measurable
  - Include problem area, goal, & intervention

Instead of...	Try...
How can we increase enrollment?	Will distance learning increase enrollment by 20%?
How can we improve adult education gains?	To what extent will the use of authentic materials increase the frequency of parents' reading and writing outside the classroom?

Phases

- **#3: Observing**
  - Systematic data collection & analysis
  - Detailed record-keeping
  - Careful selection of sample

- **#4: Reflecting**
  - What did you learn from the data?
  - How do the results compare to your benchmarks?
    - If intervention was effective: Should you do another AR cycle?
      - Same results: builds trustworthiness & dependability of findings
    - If *not* effective: Revise intervention, try a new one, or pursue a different problem?
  - Which aspects of the intervention will you keep?
  - How can you share your results?

Activity

- Problem area

- Planned outcome: What do you want to happen?
  - Participants will _____.

- What intervention could you try?

- What evidence will you use? (2+ data sources)

References & Resources

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