

# **Dallas School District**

## **Action Research Protocol**

“Reflection -- true reflection -- leads to action” (Freire, 2000)

Action Research is a reflective process that allows for inquiry and discussion as components of the “research.” Often, action research is a collaborative activity among colleagues searching for solutions to everyday, real problems experienced in schools, or looking for ways to improve instruction and increase student achievement. Rather than dealing with the theoretical, action research allows practitioners to address those concerns that are closest to them, ones over which they can exhibit some influence and make change.

Action research is a process in which participants examine their own educational practice systematically and carefully, using the techniques of research. Although there are many types of research that may be undertaken, action research specifically refers to a disciplined inquiry done by a teacher with the intent that the research will inform and change his or her practices in the future. This research is carried out within the context of the teacher’s environment—that is, with the students and at the school in which the teacher works—on questions that deal with educational matters at hand.

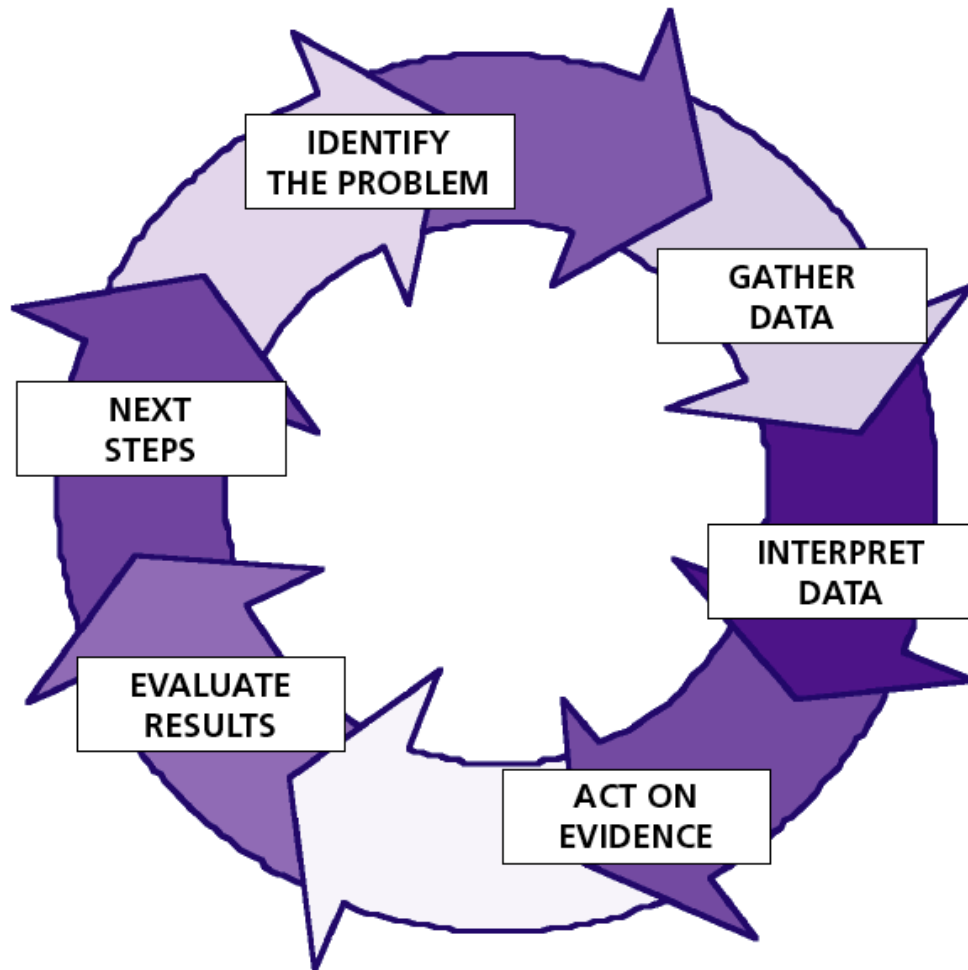
Implicit in the term action research is the idea that teachers will begin a cycle of posing questions, gathering data, reflection, and deciding on a course of action. When these decisions begin to change the school environment, a different set of circumstances appears with different problems posed, which require a new look. Indeed, many action research projects are started with a particular problem to solve, whose solution leads into other areas of study. While a teacher may work alone on these studies, it is also common for a number of teachers to collaborate on a problem, as well as enlist support and guidance from administrators, university scholars, and others. (Ferrance, 2000)

### **Steps in Action Research**

Within all the definitions of action research, there are four basic themes: empowerment of participants, collaboration through participation, acquisition of knowledge, and social change. In conducting action research, we structure routines for continuous confrontation with data on the health of a school community. These routines are loosely guided by movement through five phases of inquiry:

1. Identification of problem area
2. Collection and organization of data

3. Interpretation of data
4. Action based on data
5. Reflection



### **IDENTIFY A PROBLEM AREA**

Teachers often have several questions they wish to investigate; however, it is important to limit the question to one that is meaningful and doable in the confines of their daily work. Careful planning at this first stage will limit false starts and frustrations. There are several criteria to consider before investing the time and effort in “researching” a problem. The question should

- be a higher-order question—not a yes/no
- be stated in common language, avoiding jargon
- be concise
- be meaningful
- not already have an answer

An important guideline in choosing a question is to ask if it is something over which the teacher has influence. Is it something of interest and worth the time and effort that will be spent? Sometimes there is a discrete problem that is readily identifiable. Or, the problem to be studied may come from a feeling of discomfort or tension in the classroom. For example, a teacher may be using the latest fashionable teaching strategy, yet not really knowing or understanding what or how kids are learning.

## **GATHER DATA**

The collection of data is an important step in deciding what action needs to be taken. Multiple sources of data are used to better understand the scope of happenings in the classroom or school. There are many vehicles for collection of data:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Interviews</li> <li>● Field notes</li> <li>● Audio tapes</li> <li>● Photos</li> <li>● Memos</li> <li>● Questionnaires</li> <li>● Focus groups</li> <li>● Anecdotal records</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Portfolios</li> <li>● Checklists</li> <li>● Journals</li> <li>● Individual files</li> <li>● Logs of meetings</li> <li>● Film recordings</li> <li>● Case studies</li> <li>● Surveys</li> <li>● Diaries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Records</li> <li>● Tests</li> <li>● Report cards</li> <li>● Attendance</li> <li>● Self-assessment</li> <li>● Samples of student work</li> <li>● Projects</li> <li>● Performances</li> </ul>
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Select the data that are most appropriate for the issue being researched. Are the data easy to collect? Are there sources readily available for use? How structured and systematic will the collection be? Use at least three sources (triangulation) of data for the basis of actions. Organize the data in a way that makes it useful to identify trends and themes. Data can be arranged by gender, classroom, grade level, school, etc.

## **INTERPRET DATA**

Analyze and identify major themes. Depending upon the question, teachers may wish to use classroom data, individual data, or subgroup data. Some of the data are quantifiable and can be analyzed without the use of statistics or technical assistance. Other data, such as opinions, attitudes, or checklists, may be summarized in table form. Data that are not quantifiable can be reviewed holistically and important elements or themes can be noted.

## **ACT ON EVIDENCE**

Using the information from the data collection and review of current literature, design a plan of action that will allow you to make a change and to study that change. It is

important that only one variable be altered. As with any experiment, if several changes are made at once, it will be difficult to determine which action is responsible for the outcome. While the new technique is being implemented, continue to document and collect data on performance.

### **EVALUATE RESULTS**

Assess the effects of the intervention to determine if improvement has occurred. If there is improvement, do the data clearly provide the supporting evidence? If no, what changes can be made to the actions to elicit better results?

### **NEXT STEPS**

As a result of the action research project, identify additional questions raised by the data and plan for additional improvements, revisions, and next steps.