

Action Research

for professional development

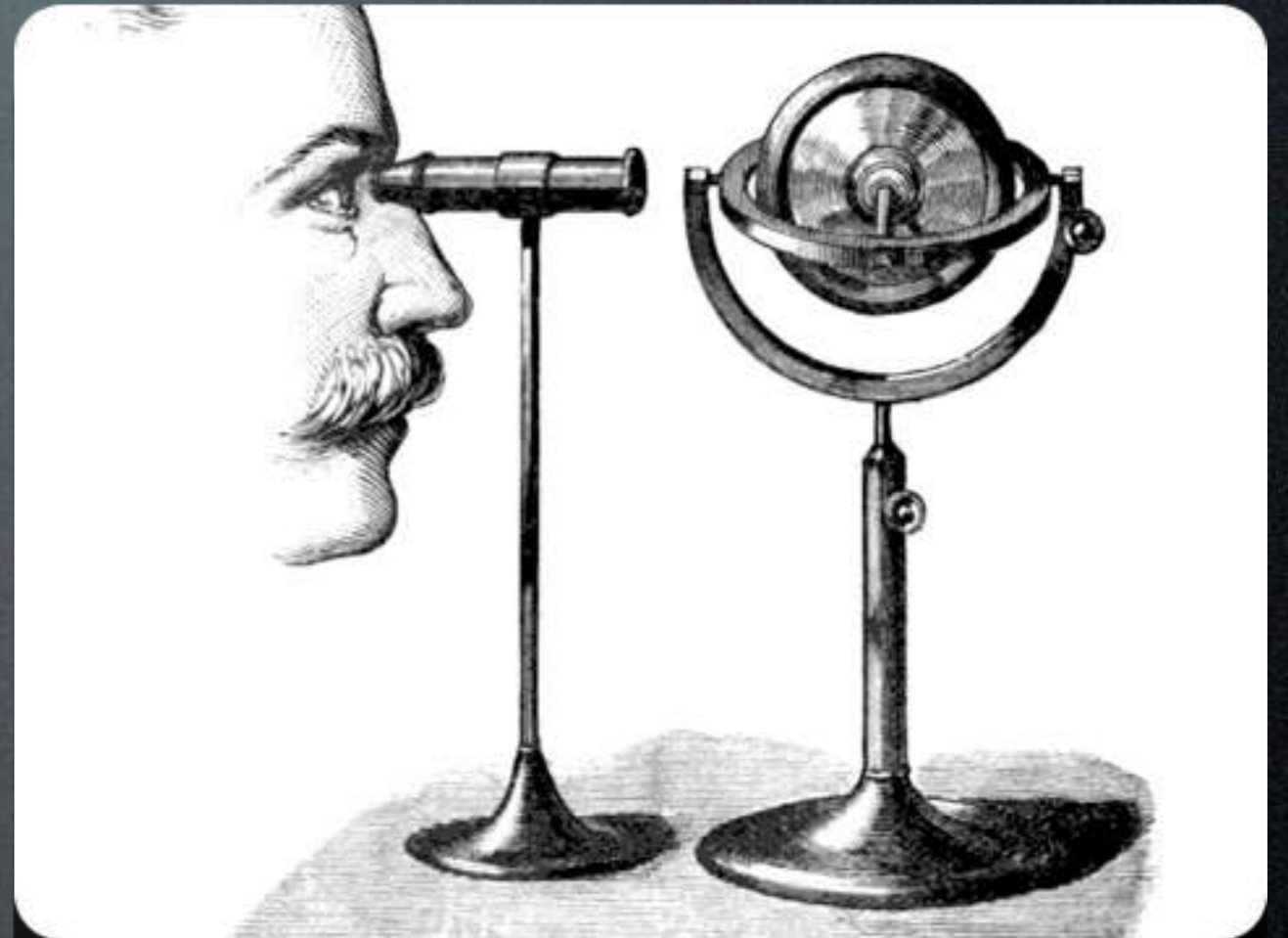
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Find someone who...



Classifying research in educational contexts

The Positivist Paradigm



The Interpretive Paradigm



The Critical Paradigm



Action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out (Carr & Kemmis, 1986:162)

What it looks like

What else it can look like

Divya's experience

'Immersion' class in a non-immersion context

Obscure attitudes

Mismatched expectations



The Cycle

‘Dysfunctions of the theory-practice divide’

‘The key point, I think, is the need for teachers to keep their own counsel regarding what works and what does not work and to insist on an interpretation of events and ideas that includes, implicitly or explicitly, a validation of their own experiences in the classroom’

(Clarke 1994: 23)

“There has been...an erosion of practitioners’ faith in the ability of academic research to deliver knowledge usable for solving social problems - indeed, a growing suspicion that academic research may actually *exacerbate* social problems...

...when practitioners accept and try to use the academy’s esoteric knowledge, they are apt to discover that its appropriation alienates them from their own understandings, engendering a loss of their sense of competence”

(Schön 1992: 120).

Teacher ('practitioner') research

Research in the hands of teachers (practitioners):

- Initiated by teachers
- Carried out by teachers
- Reported by teachers for other teachers

Teacher research can ...

- be directly useful to the teacher and students
- provide insights of relevance to other practitioners
 - be empowering for the teacher

Characteristics of action research

Action research ...

- is a form of practitioner research
- involves small-scale interventions
- involves planning a change and implementing it, observing and reflecting
- 'The aim is to [...] bring about critically informed changes in practice' (Burns 1999: 27)

Your recent experience as a starting-point

Please think about and share:

- A recent successful experience in your teaching
- A problem you have recently faced in your teaching
- Something that puzzles you in relation to your teaching

Research is ...

‘the organized, systematic search for answers to the questions we ask’ (Hatch and Lazaraton 1991: 1)

‘a process of inquiry consisting of three [...] components: (1) a question, problem, or hypothesis, (2) data, (3) analysis and interpretation of data’ (Nunan 1992)

‘systematic enquiry made public’ (Stenhouse 1975)

A 'simple', anytime teacher research plan

Research Questions: What needs to be built on / what is problematic that needs to be improved in my / our practice(s)?

Data Collection: Gather student feedback: 'good points' and 'points to improve'

Data Analysis, Interpreting and Sharing: Do a content analysis (group similar comments into categories); reflect, and perhaps discuss with colleagues – what are the main good points and points to improve which emerge?

Is this research?

Is this *action* research?

From **exploratory** research to **action** research

Planning a change: What needs to be done for improvement to occur? Plan how you will 'measure' change, too.

Research question: What change occurs?

Gather and analyse new data – for example, via a more focused questionnaire

Consider the findings – what has changed, if anything?

Possibly present findings to others. Make a new plan?

Richard's story

:

We had asked for points to improve and good points about a class and did not notice anything needing change.

But then we received the following anonymous letter. What should we do?

Dear Richard, Ema and Peter

I am one of ELSM student and am writing this letter to say something about our class [...]
This is not just my opinion [...] most of students (at least more than half) seems to be dissatisfied [...] The reason is firstly, there are too much discussion rather than input from you. [...] I am not sure what feedback you had from all different student, but I strongly believe that not everybody is honest on that issue, as we don't want to offend against any of you [...]

(as reported in Brown, Smith and Ushioda 2007)

From **problem** to **question(s)**

(Exploratory) research question: Are the letter writer's perceptions shared by most students?

Gathering data

Data collection: We had already (previously) gathered feedback on 'good points' and 'points to improve'. We now developed a questionnaire using students' own statements, also incorporating the letter-writer's complaints.

1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = disagree; 5 = strongly disagree

- | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I feel I am benefitting a lot from this course | | | | | |
| 2 | I am finding the course challenging and interesting. | | | | | |
| 3 | Now I am more confident about my ability to find answers the questions I have in my mind about teaching | | | | | |
| 4 | The experience of reflecting on my own teaching is a valuable one | | | | | |
| 5 | There is too much discussion and not enough input from the teachers | | | | | |
| 6 | This course required hard work and commitment | | | | | |
| 7 | I enjoyed finding out things that I wanted to find out | | | | | |
| 8 | I believe that I have become more critical and self-critical as a result of this course | | | | | |
| 9 | I am able to better identify my strengths and weaknesses as a result of the course. | | | | | |
| 10 | I have doubts about the usefulness of self-evaluation of teaching | | | | | |
| 11 | This course has taught me how to reflect both on my own and others' teaching | | | | | |
| 12 | There is no point doing peer-teaching | | | | | |

Analysing data

Data analysis: We counted responses for each question, and considered them, from the point of view of our research question.

No point doing peer teaching: only 1/19 agreed

Too much discussion and not enough input: 13/19 agreed, 6/19 neutral ... nobody disagreed!

I am personally dissatisfied with the course: 5/19 agreed, 10/19 disagreed, 4/19 neutral

Most students are dissatisfied with the course: 8/19 agreed, 5/19 disagreed, 6/19 neutral

Interpreting and sharing the findings

Interpreting and sharing: We shared and discussed the results with students, and later wrote a report for other teachers,

Making it 'action research'

Further action: In this and subsequent years we:

explained the rationale for the course more clearly;

- put in place tutorial arrangements which helped smooth the transition to self-directed work;
- but we did not reduce the amount of self-directed work or significantly increase the amount of input.

We gathered and analysed data and interpreted it to see how the changes had been received

Over to you again: your research questions

Choose one topic area

What could your research questions be in this area?

Exploratory research questions – exploring the situation more (e.g. How do I know X?; What do students think about X?)

Action research questions – exploring *and* asking what changes if I make an intervention (above questions *plus* ‘what changes if I do Y?’)

Examples of **exploratory** research questions

[I want to improve my students' concentration]

- How do I know if students are concentrating?
- What physical or emotional problems are affecting students' ability to learn English?

[I find it difficult to teach a mixed-level class]

- What is problematic for me?
- Do students find being in such a class problematic? If so, what is problematic?

[I use group work - I think it is successful, and I want to build on that success]

- What do students think about group work?
- What do students think can be improved about group work?

Examples of **action** research questions

[I want to improve my students' concentration]

- How do I know if students are concentrating?
- What physical or emotional problems are affecting students' ability to learn English?
- **What happens to students' concentration when I do X?**

[I find it difficult to teach a mixed-level class]

- What is problematic for me?
- Do students find being in such a class problematic? If so, what is problematic?
- **What happens to (my and students') perceptions when I do X?**

[I use group work - I think it is successful, and I want to build on that success]

- What do I observe students doing in group work?
- Which of these behaviours make me think it is successful?
- What do students think about group work?
- **When I increase the 'successful' elements of group work, what happens?**

What data is already available to me for analysis (or available with only a little more work)? Can I realistically analyse it? How?

What kind of extra data is necessary for answering my questions? Can I realistically collect this? Can I realistically analyse it? How (for both)? Can I collect data in a way that benefits students / that doesn't interfere with teaching?

Decide on and develop ways of analysing existing data or collecting and analysing new data which suit your research questions and which are realistic.

Data collection tools, or procedures

- Observing (who? what?)
- Notes while or after teaching
- Audio- or video-recording
- Transcribing (parts of) a lesson

- Interviews
- Class discussion / focus groups
- Questionnaires
- Reflective writing by students

Which tool(s) would be suitable for finding answers to your research questions?

References

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