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UNDERSTANDING ACTION RESEARCH

Action research has long been considered a desirable form of teachers' professional development. However, teachers often have no idea what is meant by action research and how they can do the research.

In this article we target at developing understanding of an action research and its stages. To begin with we will clarify the notion of an action research.

As its name suggests, action research concerns actors – those people carrying out their professional actions from day to day – and its purpose is to understand and to improve those actions. It is about trying to understand professional action from the inside; as a result, it is research that is carried out by practitioners on their own practice, not (as in other forms of research), done by someone on somebody else's practice. Action research in education is grounded in the working lives of teachers, as they experience them [1].

Borg [2], an authority on action research, mentions that this kind of research is not a new idea; its origins can be traced back many years to the work of Kurt Lewin in the 1940s. Australia, in particular, has a strong tradition of educational action research going back some 30 years (see, for example, the work of Kemmis & McTaggart) and this is evident too (especially through the work of Anne Burns) in the field of English language teaching. According to Burns, A. (2010) action research is an essential tool that empowers teachers to find their own answers to their own questions. In Borg's opinion the basic idea in action research is that professional growth and better quality educational provision can be achieved when teachers (individually or collaboratively) engage in cycles of systematic classroom inquiry [2].

The key points of an action research outlined in these studies can be summarized as follows:

- action research is a practical way for individuals to explore the nature of their practice and to improve it;

- action research encourages practitioners to become knowledge-makers, rather than merely knowledge-users;

- action research uses action as a means of research; planned change is implemented, monitored and analysed;

- action research proceeds in an action-reflection cycle or spiral;

- action research is carried out by individuals, but these individuals may work collaboratively;

- action researchers may use a variety of research methods, both qualitative and quantitative;

- action researchers must ensure triangulation in their methods.

Generally, the research process is broken down into three stages:

- planning research
- doing research
- reporting research

In his booklet, Borg [3] highlights that in conventional research these stages are often sequenced in a linear fashion; in action research though, they interact, particularly the ‘planning’ and ‘doing’ stages. Thus, action research undergoes the following stages:

- define the focus of the study
- develop a rationale for the research
- conduct a literature review
- specify objectives and research questions
- design the study
- write a research proposal
- develop a timetable
- consult headteachers, colleagues, and students
- secure research funding.

So, action research is a flexible and emergent process – so not every decision needs to be - or indeed can be - fixed from the outset.

REFERENCES

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