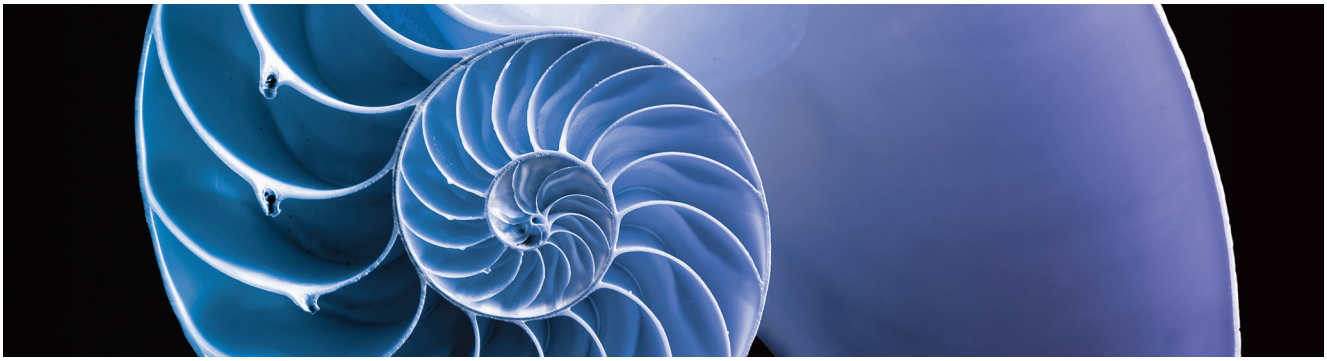

ACTION RESEARCH: A POWERFUL DESIGN

In their chapter on action research in *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning* (Easton, 2015), Cathy Caro-Bruce and Mary Klehr describe a challenging issue that a teacher bravely takes on as an action research project. Using the classic steps for action research, she discovers what needs to be done, does it, and then reflects on and shares the results. The authors share strategies and techniques for making action research productive in today's schools.

Picture a spiral going around and around. Or a long mobile, spinning slowly in the breeze. Or a rare shell whose design conveys circular motions evolving over time. Or even a Möbius strip. These are all images of action research. Action research is an iterative form of inquiry through which participants actively engage in examining their own educational practice, systematically and carefully, using research techniques to impact teacher and student learning (Watts, 1985). Action research affects the researchers, the contexts in which they work, and the children they teach.

Action researchers follow steps based on good research techniques, but the process invites researchers to cycle continuously through earlier phases as they construct new meaning and discover new questions based on what they find in their data and as their instructional practice evolves. Action research is far from a linear, lockstep, formulaic process. While traditional researchers sometimes criticize the openness and flexibility of action research, its cyclical and responsive nature is what makes the process so valuable to teachers.

The tools on the following pages are resources available to supplement the chapter on action research in *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning.* For each learning design featured in the book, exclusive online resources help educators implement the learning design or explore the topic further.

REFERENCES

Easton, L.B. (2015). *Powerful designs for professional learning* (3rd ed.). Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

Watts, H. (1985, Spring). When teachers are researchers, teaching improves. *Journal of Staff Development, 6*(2), 118-127.

Source: Adapted from **Easton, L.B. (2015).** *Powerful designs for professional learning* (3rd ed.). Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

Starting points

Name: _____

I would really like to improve: _____

_____

I am perplexed by: _____

_____

Some people are unhappy about: _____

_____

I'm really curious about: _____

_____

I want to learn more about: _____

_____

An idea I would like to try in my class is: _____

_____

Something I think would really make a difference is: _____

_____

Something I would like to change is: _____

_____

Right now, some areas I'm particularly interested in are: _____

_____

Source: Easton, L.B. (2015). *Powerful designs for professional learning* (3rd ed.). Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

Process for analyzing data

In using qualitative research, you will collect and analyze data at the same time. These processes inform each other. Be open to new ways of thinking as you learn more from your data.

- **Go through all data you have collected.** Make notes as you go.

- **Look for themes, patterns, big ideas.** Key words and phrases can trigger themes. Determine these themes by your scan of the data, not your preconceived ideas of what you think the categories are.

- **Narrow down the themes to something manageable.** Choose three to five of your most compelling and interesting themes.

- **Go back through all of your data.** Code or label information according to the themes in order to organize your ideas. Some ideas may fit into more than one theme. Create subgroups under each theme.

- **Write continuously.** Jot down what you are seeing, what questions are emerging, and what you are learning. Keep notes on new ideas or findings that are unanticipated.

- **Review your information after it is coded/labeled.** Look to see if there is a frequency of certain items and/or powerful, interesting, unusual comments or behaviors that are of particular interest to you. This may be an incident that gives you a new insight, and it may be one of the most important to hold on to.

- **Identify the main points that appear most frequently and are the most powerful.** It will be hard to let go of some of your information, but it is important to sift through it.

- **Write down your major points.** You can write them by theme, chronologically, or according to the different modes you used for collecting information.

- **Draw the information together to include some of the evidence that supports each of your themes.** The reader should be able to draw conclusions based on the evidence you have presented.

Source: Easton, L.B. (2015). *Powerful designs for professional learning* (3rd ed.). Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

Action plan

I. Action research topic: _____

_____

II. Question I am pursuing: _____

_____

III. Steps that need to be taken:	By when	Person(s) responsible	Resources/ Support
A.			
B.			
C.			
D.			
E.			

Source: Easton, L.B. (2015). *Powerful designs for professional learning* (3rd ed.). Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

Analysis leading to action

Now that you have analyzed your data . . .

- ❑ What have you learned? _____
- ❑ How do you feel about what you have learned? _____
- ❑ How do your conclusions differ from what you thought you would learn? _____
- ❑ Do the conclusions seem believable? _____
- ❑ What actions might you take based on your conclusions? _____
- ❑ What new questions emerge for you from the data? _____
- ❑ Who else might be interested in these conclusions? _____
- ❑ What strategies can you use to share your conclusions with others? _____

Source: Easton, L.B. (2015). *Powerful designs for professional learning* (3rd ed.). Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.