



ISSN: 0975-833X

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A CLOSER LOOK AT USING STRINGER'S ACTION RESEARCH MODEL IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' LEARNING

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 17th April, 2015
Received in revised form
25th May, 2015
Accepted 28th June, 2015
Published online 31st July, 2015

Key words:

Action Research,
Teacher-Researcher,
Stringer's Model,
Education,
Student Learning.

ABSTRACT

Action research is a systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives. A significant feature is that action research lays claim to the professional development in education. Action research as any systematic inquiry conducted by teachers, administrators, and counselors with a vested interest in the teaching and learning process, for the purpose of gathering data about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how their students learn. Education is perhaps the most prolific source of action research resources. Action research can be done by teachers in their own classrooms with the goal of improving pedagogy and student learning. This research aims to conduct a review on Springer's action research approach for teachers and others involved in schools to engage in systematic inquiry with the intent of improving their educational practices or solving significant problems they experience in their professional life. This review article shows action research provides a fruitful avenue of investigation for teachers, administrators, and others involved in education. This study describes the process of Springer's action research that enables teachers to keep track and take account of the many aspects of their work with students through a systematic routine.

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Citation: Mohammad Ali Nasrollahi, 2015. "A closer look at using stringer's action research model in improving students' learning", *International Journal of Current Research*, 7, (7), 18663-18668.

INTRODUCTION

Action research intends to support teachers, and groups of teachers, in coping with the challenges and problems of practice and carrying through innovations in a reflective way. Experience with action research, so far, has shown that teachers are able to do this successfully and can achieve remarkable results when given opportunities and support (Altrichter *et al.*, 2005:4). Wallace (1998) believes most teachers wish to develop themselves professionally in improving student learning. They have access to a wide variety of methods of doing this. One method is by reflecting on interesting or problematic areas in a structured way. This is called action research, the systematic collection and analysis of data relating to the improvement of some aspect of professional practice (Ferrance, 2000; Koshy, 2005; Altrichter *et al.*, 2005; Somekh, 2006; Burns, 2009; Norton, 2009; Alber, 2010; Ary *et al.*, 2010; Stringer *et al.*, 2010). This review paper intends to produce a practical and feasible instructional strategy by action research for improving student learning in schools.

Hence, using action research is the unique feature in this sense. The teacher-researcher does the research and the researcher is directly to teach the students. Indeed, teacher is much more attentive to the process of learning than to the product of learning.

Action Research

The different conceptions of action research can be revealed in some typical definitions of action research, for example Elliott (1991:69), whose work has been influential in action research 'movement', gives the shortest and most straightforward definition of action research: action research is 'the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it'. This simple definition directs attention to one of the most essential motives for doing action research. It lies in the will to improve the quality of teaching and learning as well as the conditions under which teachers and students work in schools. McNiff (2002:6) who regards action research as a form of "self-reflective practice" that involves thinking and reflecting process takes a more philosophical stance on action research, which echoes the work of Elliott. McNiff (2002) also elaborates action research is open ended. Stringer (2007:1) suggests that action research is a systematic approach to

investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives. The rigour of action research is attested by another i.e. Mills (2003) regards action research as any systematic inquiry conducted by teachers, administrators, counselors, or others with a vested interest in the teaching and learning process, for the purpose of gathering data about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how their students learn. Phillips and Carr (2010) argues action research as a "practitioner-based" form of research. In other words, it is done by teachers in their own classrooms with the goal of improving pedagogy and student learning. The several strands of action research are drawn together by Stringer (2004:6) in his all-encompassing definition when he refers action research is designed for practical purposes having direct and effective outcomes in the settings in which it is engaged. At the heart of the process, however, are teachers with the intent to investigate issues that help them more effectively and efficiently engage the complex world of the classroom. Stringer (2004, 2007) distinguishes action research from the everyday actions of teachers:

- Action research is not an objective and generalizable experimental and survey studies that continue to provide significant information about schools and classrooms. Action research is a systematic qualitative research routine.
- Action research is not a quantitative research (sometimes referred to as experimental or positivistic research). Action research is grounded in a qualitative research paradigm whose purpose is to gain greater clarity and understanding of a question, problem, or issue.
- Action research is not merely, on *what* is happening, Action research is necessarily based on localized studies that focus on the need to understand *how* things are happening.
- In action research, the role of the researcher is not that of an expert who *does* research but that of a resource person. He or she becomes a facilitator or consultant who acts as a catalyst to assist participants in defining their problems clearly and to support them as they work toward effective solutions to the issues that concern them.
- Action research is not just a formal process of inquiry, but may be applied systematically as a tool for learning in classrooms and schools.'
- A significant feature is that action research lays claim to the professional development in education.

Stringer (2007:16) argues education is perhaps the most prolific source of action research resources. Holly *et al.* (2005) suggest that action research can be used for curriculum purposes and incorporate case studies in classroom contexts. The claims for action research, then, are several. Mills (2007) positions action research as a fundamental component of teaching, alongside curriculum development, assessment, and classroom management. Indeed recent developments in research methodology have therefore spawned a rich variety of approaches for teachers and others involved in schools to engage in systematic inquiry with the intent of improving their educational practices or solving significant problems they experience in their professional life. Stringer (2004:1) elaborates action research now provides a fruitful avenue of investigation for teachers, administrators, and others involved

in education. They focused on general issues concerning their teaching practices and the ways systematic inquiry might assist them in resolving those issues.

The Concept of the Teacher-Researcher

The concept of teacher-researcher owes a great debt to such professionals as social psychologist Lewin (1946). While Lewin (1946) did not necessarily intend for his work to be used in education, his series of four cycling steps (planning, acting, reflecting, and observing) became useful to teacher research. Corey (1949) introduced the term action research to education, believing if teachers conducted their own research it would be more meaningful to them. Scholars and teachers such as Stenhouse (1975, 1980) and Rudduck and Hopkins (1985) continued to encourage teachers to see themselves as researchers and thus evaluate their own practice. Carr and Kemmis (1986), Kemmis *et al.* (1988) contributed to the rising tide of teachers who assumed the identity of researcher in their classrooms. There are many recognizable names in the action research field, such as Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993), Elliot (1991), McNiff *et al.* (2003), Noffke *et al.* (1995), Schon (1990), Zeichner *et al.* (1995), Norton (2009), Sringer *et al.* (2010), Dick (1998), Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998), Sagor (2005), Burns (2009) and Philips and Carr (2010).

All have contributed in demonstrating the positive influence of action research as professional development for teachers and as a powerful vehicle for altering the status quo of schools. Many others have since added to this rich tradition, including theorists, philosophers, educational researchers, and a host of classroom teacher-researchers, making the community of action researchers lively, diverse and international (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). In a contrary manner, Roulston *et al.* (2005:182) cited in Norton (2009:60) make a telling point about the role of research for teacher-researchers. Their major criticisms pointed out that although the teacher-research movement has long advocated teachers being involved in educational research, academia tends to review such work and it is frequently left incited in the academic literature. They also make the point that it is not only that teachers are thought to be inadequate to the task of conducting quality research but also, some consider the kind of knowledge that teacher research produces to be inferior to and less valuable than other kinds of academic work.

Norton (2009) address the same point that teachers have been carrying out action research for years but sometimes have been criticized for not being equipped with the basic knowledge, skills or research methodology in order to do research of any value. Conceptions of teacher researcher have also been critiqued as being too simplistic. Nevertheless, in spite of some of the criticisms of the conceptions of teacher researcher, it can be used as a very powerful framework for challenging the status quo and bringing about change in classroom. Stringer (2007) argues that the common response from teachers when it is suggested they engage in research in their classrooms is often some combination of surprise, disbelief, and wariness. They wished to learn an approach to research that enabled them to empower teachers and children, giving them voice and enabling them to be part of the research process rather than

being outside looking in. All were concerned that their research should have some practical outcome. Stringer (2004:1-6) makes several claims for action research with teachers, namely that

- It increase the effectiveness of the teachers' work in which they are engaged.
- It assists them in working through the sometimes-puzzling complexity of the issues they confront to make their work more meaningful and fulfilling.
- It provides a useful tool for day-to-day planning in classrooms such as lesson planning, formulating teaching strategies, and student assessment, or more ex tasks like syllabus planning, curriculum construction, and evaluation.
- The systematic processes of action research extend teacher professional capacities, providing a set of tools that enhance general classroom planning and school program development.
- It involves teachers trying to see the effects of planned change in their practice.

It is clear from the list that action research is a blend of practical and theoretical concerns; it is both action and research. Cherry and Bowden (1999:13) makes the point that to engage in action research is "to operate in both the inner and outer world, to be capable of both action and reflection."

The Purpose of Using Action Research Teaching

Stringer *et al.* (2010:7) suggests that the purpose of incorporating action research routines into teaching is:

- To provide teachers with a framework or scaffold that enables them to systematically take into account diverse issues.
- To provide the means for teachers to incorporate these diverse elements into their instruction, and to organize their work so that they effectively accomplish the demanding task of teaching.
- To provide teachers with an opportunity to better understanding what happens in their classroom.

Indeed, there is nothing magical or particularly complex about action research. In other words, action research enables teachers to keep track and take account of the many aspects of their work with students through a systematic routine. Richards and Farrell (2005:182) makes the point that action research takes place in the teacher's own classroom and involves a cycle of activities centering on identifying a problem or issue, collecting information about the issue, devising a strategy to address the issue, trying out the strategy, and observing its effects.

Stringer's Model of Action Research (1999-2010)

The approach to action research was presented by Stringer (1999, 2004 & 2007) and Stringer *et al.* (2010) is derived from interpretive research processes suggested by Denzin (1997). It is based on the assumption that knowledge inherent in people's every day, taken-for-granted lives has as much validity and utility as knowledge linked to the concepts and theories of the

academic disciplines or bureaucratic policies and procedures. The intent is to concede the limitations of expert knowledge and to acknowledge the competence, experience, understanding, and wisdom of ordinary people. In Stringer's view, action research therefore seeks to give voice to people who have previously been silent research subjects. He makes the point that like other forms of interpretive research, action research seeks to reveal and represent people's experience, providing accounts that enable others to interpret issues and events in their daily lives (Stringer, 2007:170). Stringer's model of action research is a collaborative approach to inquiry or investigation that provides people with the means to take systematic action to resolve specific problems. Stringer (2007) argues that action research is not a panacea for all ills and does not resolve all problems but provides a means for people to "get a handle" on their situations and formulate effective solutions to problems they face in their public and professional lives. Stringer provides a basic action research routine that provides a simple powerful framework-Look, Think, Act (Table.1)-that enables people to commence their inquiries in a straightforward manner and build detail into procedures as the complexity of issues increases. The terms in parentheses in Table 1 show how the phases of the routine relate to traditional research practices.

Table 1. The Phases of the Routine Relate to Traditional Research Practices

A Basic Action Research Routine
Look
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather relevant information (Gather data) • Build a picture: Describe the situation (Define and describe)
Think
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore and analyze: What is happening here? (Analyze) • Interpret and explain: How/why are things as they are? (Theorize)
Act
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan (Report) • Implement • Evaluate

Source: Stringer (2007:8)

Stringer (2004:10) emphasizes, "Although action research has much in common with the regular problem-solving and planning processes used by educators in the course of their daily classroom and school work, its strength lies in its systematic execution of carefully articulated processes of inquiry." Stringer makes the points that as researchers implement a study these processes may usefully be depicted as shown in (Fig.1)

- **Design the study**-carefully refining the issue to be investigated, planning systematic processes of inquiry, and checking the ethics and validity of their work
- **Gather data**-including information from a variety of sources
- **Analyze the data**-to identify key features of the issue investigated
- **Communicate**-the outcomes of the study to relevant audiences
- **Use**-the outcomes of the study to work toward resolution of the issue investigated

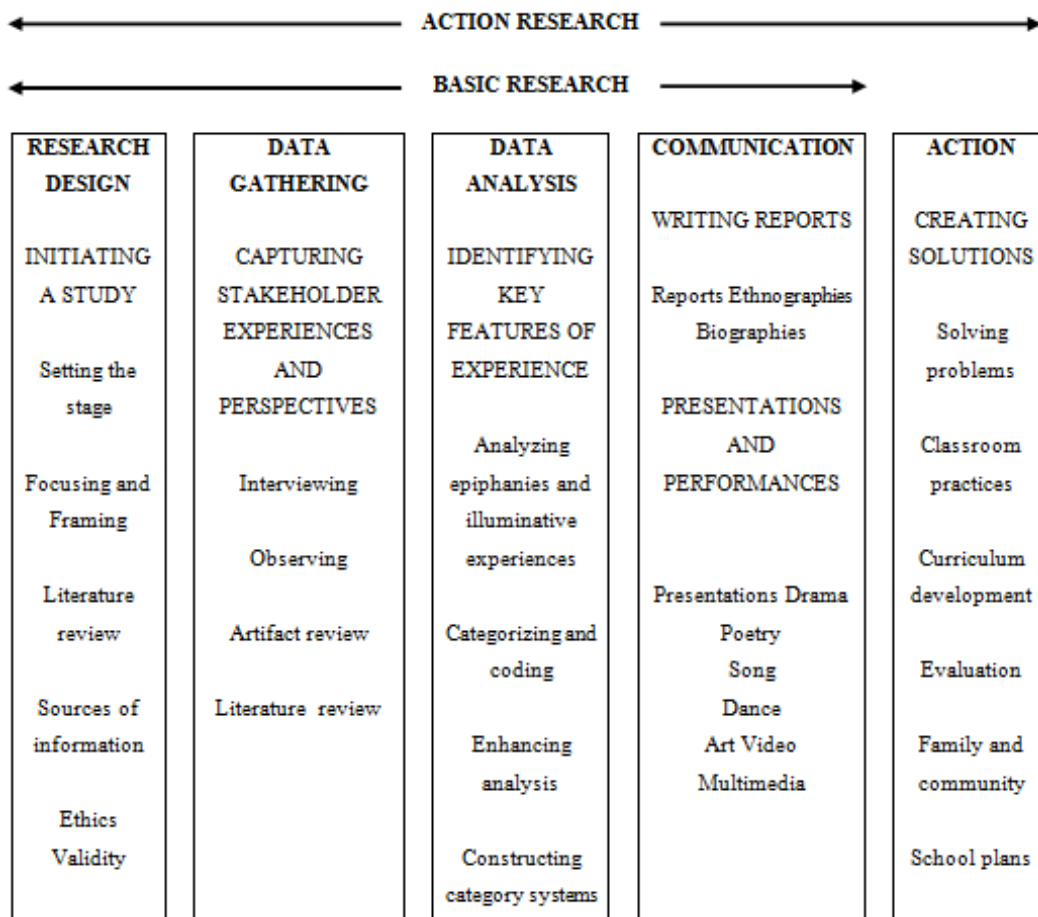


Figure 1. Action Research Sequence
Stringer: Stringer (2004:10)

As the Fig.1 illustrates, action research is distinguished from basic research by an "action" phase of inquiry. While basic research provides information not necessarily used in the research context, action research always has an immediate practical or applied purpose. Stringer's model of action research is cyclical in nature, since research participants continuously cycle through processes of investigation as they work towards effective solutions to their research problem. The sequence is more commonly presented as a cycle, on a simple Look > Think > Act, as shown in Fig.2. This simple process is repeated in an ongoing fashion, providing a constant guide to ongoing processes of teaching and learning (Fig.2)

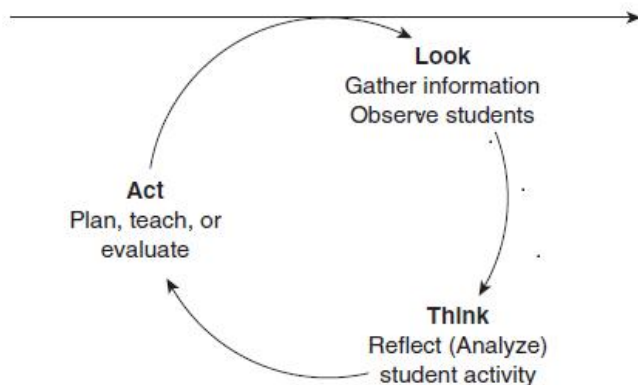


Figure 2. Action Research Cycle
Source: Stringer et al. (2010:23)

Stringer 's model "look, think, act" routine is presented in a linear format (Fig.3) to indicate that phases of the research are repeated over time.

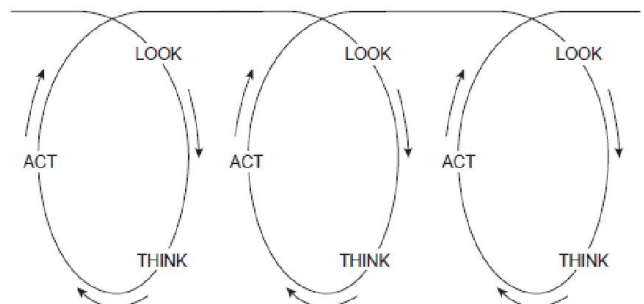


Figure 3. Action Research Interacting Spiral
Source: Stringer (2007:30)

Stringer (2007:30) argues that as participants work through each of the major stages, they will explore the details of their activities through a constant process of observation, reflection, and action. At the completion of each set of activities, they will review (look again), reflect (reanalyze), and re-act (modify their actions).

The Stringer's model of action research consequently will differ significantly from those derived from prevailing studies because of the interpretive assumptions that are implicit in the approach to inquiry:

- Studies are usually limited in context, engaging processes of inquiry that focus on a specific issue or problem in a particular context.
- Researchers seek to empower principal stakeholders by engaging them as active participants in all phases of the research project, including the planning and implementing processes. It has been described as research *of, by, and for* the people.
- The principal purpose of the research is to extend people's understanding of an issue by providing detailed, richly described accounts that reveal the problematic, lived experience of stakeholders and their interpretations of the issue investigated.
- Stakeholder joint accounts, derived from creative processes of negotiation, provide the basis for therapeutic action that works toward resolution of the issue or problem investigated. These processes ensure tangible outcomes of direct benefit to the principal stakeholders.
- Stakeholder perspectives are placed alongside viewpoints found within the academic and bureaucratic literature.
- The outcomes of the research make the experience and perspectives of ordinary people directly available to stakeholders—professional practitioners, policymakers, managers, and administrators—so that more appropriate and effective programs and services can be formulated (Stringer, 2007:170).

According to discussion mentioned above, the first phase of Stringer's action research model (Look) allows the teacher-researcher to identify student understanding which used to support teaching and learning directly. The purpose of the second phase (Think) is to determine to what degree the teacher's objectives are met. Through the second phase, what the teacher finds out from the action research outcomes was very useful and there are enough evidences for him to see that the students' activities have yielded some success in achieving more involvement of students with the assessment of their learning. This phase also allowed for the exchange of a variety of perspectives and new ideas. The third phase of the Stringer's Action research cycle (Act), focused on evaluation the students' performance, and then providing feedback.

Summary

Action research seeks to give voice to people who have previously been silent research subjects. Action research aims to support teachers in dealing with the difficulties of student learning in a reflective way. Action research as any systematic inquiry conducted by teachers, administrators, and counselors with a vested interest in the teaching and learning process, for the purpose of gathering data about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how their students learn. This review article shows action research provides a fruitful avenue of investigation for teachers, administrators, and others involved in education. During this study, model of action research is demonstrated as a well-documented by describing three phases of Stringer's model (Look, Think, Act) which involves not only the teacher in the process of the research, but also the students as action researchers collaborating in the action research process. A majority of teachers try to expand their knowledge professionally in improving student learning.

Action research is the unique systematic collection and analysis of data that plays an important role in improving of some aspect of professional practice. Therefore, teacher as a researcher not only carry out the research but also teach the students directly. Indeed, teacher is much more attentive to the process of learning and collects data about how the school is operated, how the students learn and what students' weaknesses and strengths are.

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