SEQUAL
Practitioner Action Research
2009-2010

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Introduction

Practitioner Action Research

What is Practitioner Action Research (PAR)?
Practitioner Action Research is a reflective process of progressive problem-solving that helps you to answer questions you have about issues in your program or practice. In a community of learners, practitioners decide their OWN questions and work collaboratively to find ways to improve their practice and programs.

According to B. Allan Quigley[1], action research is defined as, "A type of research in which educators, often with stakeholders and other professionals, examine their own practice, take specific actions to improve practice, and interpret the results. In action research, people systematically analyze a problem, review the literature and relevant experience, set a baseline for purposes of comparative analysis, systematically gather evidence on the observed change(s), and collectively reflect on the outcomes." [2] Quigley also once called it, quite simply, "Satisfying the itch."

For our purposes, we will consider four main phases of PAR:
- Question-Posing
- Planning
- Observing the Intervention
- Reflecting

What Action Research is NOT:
1. It is <u>not</u> the usual things practitioners do when they think about their practice. PAR is systematic and involves collecting evidence and reflecting rigorously.
2. It is <u>not</u> just problem-solving. It involves problem- or question-posing and is motivated by a quest to improve and understand.
3. It is <u>not </u>the scientific method applied to practice. While it poses questions, devises interventions to improve, and uses data to inform, it is concerned about changing situations, not just interpreting them. It changes both the researcher and the situation.

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[1] Quigley, B.A. (1999). *Pennsylvania action research handbook and project planner.* Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education and the Pennsylvania State University. (Served as the base for this handbook)
[2] Quigley, B. A. (2006). *Building professional pride in literacy: A dialogical guide to professional development (Professional practices in adult education and lifelong learning.)* Melbourne, FL: Krieger Publishing Co. (P. 171).

For 2009-2011: Due to the Pennsylvania budget not being passed until November 2009, SEQUAL/PAR will traverse two program years. From July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2010, programs will **ONLY be required to:**

1) Decide on one of the following three areas to investigate:
   a. Implement the ACIRI in this inaugural year
   b. Improve workplace readiness skills
   c. Choose a specific need
2) Research the area using
   a. Research on parent/child dialogic reading
   b. Research on workplace readiness skills
   c. Past PAR projects that align with your area
3) Draft and submit a solid question, intervention(s), and data sources (form on page 10)
4) Share with TA, SEQUAL advisor, and other colleagues via scheduled distance opportunities (conference calls, webinar, etc.)
5) Participate in Spring SEQUAL-PAR workshops

Some programs may want to do more than the minimum outlined above. Some may have already started a PAR project. These programs may decide to continue the project in 2010-2011.

Background to the Areas
Adult- Child Interactive Reading Inventory (ACIRI)[3]:
Beginning in 2009-2010, family literacy programs will be using the ACIRI to assess interactive reading between parents and children for children who range in age between 3 and 5 years. The ACIRI replaces self-reporting on interactive reading and was selected because it is a pre- and post-measure of both child and adult behavior during ILA with specific observable measures. Because implementing the ACIRI introduces another level of responsibility and accountability for family literacy programs, the SEQUAL team decided that investigating issues related to the ACIRI would be a worthwhile PAR project. Questions you might consider will follow.

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[3] DeBruin-Parecki, Andrea. (2007). *Let's read together: Improving literacy outcomes with the adult-child interactive reading inventory (ACIRI).* Baltimore: Brookes.

Workplace Readiness
Having the skills and knowledge to obtain, retain, or advance in a job is imperative in today's economy and is a priority for the state and the nation. This year, the SEQUAL PAR team decided that a strand that focuses on workplace readiness would be a valuable area of investigation. Using the *Foundation Skills Framework,*[4] practitioners and their program improvement team (PIT) will have three options for a PAR project.

1. "Drawing the Line." Students will learn about workforce resources and connect them to their existing skills and work goals.
2. "Doing the Deed."Using a project-based model, select two-three skills from the *Framework* and develop a project that will increase these skills.
3. Pilot and evaluate the effectiveness of *Workplace Focused Family Literacy Plans*. Curricula were developed for four skills from the *Foundations Skills Framework,* Works in Teams, Locates and Uses Resources, Demonstrates Self Management Strategies, and Demonstrates Effective Interpersonal Relations.

Your Own Area
You may have an area in need of improving that is particular to your program that you want to investigate. As in the past two years, you may devise a PAR project to address this issue.

Step 1: Question-Posing
The Question Area
To start to determine where to focus your PAR work, begin by reflecting on practice and think about problems, issues, questions, or concerns you might have. Look at your extant data in terms of the area you have chosen. Data can be from state or local reports based on Performance Standards. Data can also be your demographics, or observations or questions that you have about your program's quality, students' concerns or progress toward goals, case studies. To help you, look at the *Indicators of Program Quality* and consider how your program fares in terms of these "best practices."

To begin, you may just start with an "itch" or "wondering." Starting points for your "wonderings" can be guided by the following:

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[4] Workforce Education Research Center. Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy. The Pennsylvania State University. www.pawerc.org.

- "I am curious about…."
- "I would like to improve…"
- "I don't understand why…"
- "How can we….?"
- "How do we efficiently implement…?"

"Question Posing"

Analysis

What is happening now? Why do we want to improve this? How do we know it's a problem? After discussion, write the question areas you might investigate.

Next, think deeply. What are the real underlying reasons for this issue? WHAT really needs to be improved?

As you form your question area, think about these:

Commitment
- "Is this something we want to spend time on?"
- "Are there other more pressing issues that need our attention?"
- "Will others agree to help?"

Feasibility
- "Is it possible to create one or more interventions (specific actions) to address the question?"
- "Will we be able to implement the interventions? Is it do-able?"

Management
- "Will we be able to manage and observe the intervention?"
- "Will we be able to complete it in the program year to see results?"

Prior Research
- "Are there other studies on this issue?" "What does the literature/research say about this?"
- "Have other programs experienced the same as I?"

SEE APPENDIX "A" FOR RESEARCH/RESOURCES ON YOUR TOPIC AREAS

Do NOT tackle questions that you can't do anything about or over which you have no control.

Step 2: Planning the Intervention(s)

Now that you've decided on a question area and know that it is important, do-able, and worth the effort, it's time to think of ways to address the question in order to improve your program. First, decide who should be on your team.

The Program Improvement Team (PIT)

Identify administrators, teachers, collaborators, and adult students to serve on your team. The PIT may change as the question is identified and the intervention is implemented. Keep in mind that sometimes it's good to have someone outside the "topic" on your team for fresh eyes. For example, if the question/problem is about adult learning gains, it may still be effective to have an early childhood partner on your team.

Conceptualizing the Intervention

With your PIT, discuss the following:

- What interventions might we use to resolve the question? (Brainstorm all possibilities; later eliminate those that cannot meet the criteria for **Commitment, Feasibility, Management**).

- What are possible implications or side effects for these interventions? (e.g. Your question might be how to increase enrollment, but the groups you target may create other problems, for example, getting enough hours for retention.)

- What resources will we need? (human or other)

- How do we involve the learners in PAR? How do we get their buy-in to try our plan?

Developing the Measures

- What is the baseline? If you want to have a sense of "better," you need to know where you started. Better than "what?" The baseline is the "what?" (e.g. enrollment from previous year, attendance in early fall, adult or child scores from previous year)

- What are our goals? How will we know if we reached them? What are my criteria for success? (e.g. increase in enrollment to meet standard, retention increase of 20%, score gain of 10%)

- What constraints in data collection might we encounter? What can we do about them?

- What data will tell us if each intervention worked? For each intervention you have, you should have at least one source of data. See Appendix "B" for suggested methods of collecting data. Plan to use at least three methods for "triangulation" of data. (e.g. hard data, observation, pre and post videos, focus groups).

Here are some data tips from Madison Metropolitan School District, Madison, Wisconsin.
"The 5W's and an H"
- WHY are we collecting these data? (What are we hoping to learn? Is there a match between what we hope to learn and the data?)
- WHAT exactly are we collecting? (What different sources will allow us to learn best? What previous data can we use? How much data do we need to learn if we were successful?)
- WHERE are we going to collect the data and for how long? (Are there any limitations? What support systems do we need to collect data?)
- WHEN are we going to collect the data and for how long? (Will we collect data at several points? Are there strategies we can use to observe during class? How will we make the time for data collection?)
- WHO is going to collect the data? (Are there data that can be generated by the students? Is there a colleague who can be an impartial observer or help to collect data?)
- HOW will data be collected and displayed? (What is the plan for analyzing the data? Reflecting on the results?)

The Research Question

If you've identified your question area, your baseline, your goals, and your interventions(s), you are ready to try to write your question. Here some examples of "bad" questions and "good" questions to give you some ideas.

"BAD" Questions	"GOOD" Questions
How can I increase my enrollment? *(Problem area, but no baseline, no final goal, no intervention.)*	To what extent will distance learning increase enrollment by 20% to meet the enrollment standard?
How can I increase hours in parent education and meet or exceed the standard? *(Problem area and goal, only.)*	To what extent will using parent-selected topics and activities improve attendance by 20% in Parent Education?
How can I improve adult education gains? *(General area, only)*	To what extent will the use of scientifically-based reading research improve adults' reading levels? To what extent will cooperative learning improve learners' confidence in their ability to do algebra?

Sample ACIRI Questions:
1. To what extent does the amount of professional development increase teacher fidelity (*accuracy and exactness)* and/or teacher confidence in the administration of the ACIRI?

   Data sources:

   - Amount of PD provided
   - Video
   - Teacher reflection
   - PD/workshop evaluation
   - Inter-rater reliability (this is probably tied to video data)
   - Teacher confidence rating scale/poll (pre-/post-)
   - Interviews

2. To what extent does the implementation of the ACIRI increase parent understanding of the value of interactive literacy activities?

   Data Sources:

   - Parent rating scale/poll of the value of ILA (pre-/post-)
   - Interviews

- Parent-teacher meeting notes
- Workshop/PD evaluations

3. To what extent does participation in the ACIRI activities in the manual *Let's Read Together* change the scores of the parent-child shared reading dyad from Time 1 to Time 2?

Data Sources:

- Number of activities participated in
- ACIRI scores of Time 1 and Time 2
- Parent evaluations of activities
- Amount of time parents practiced the activities at home

Sample Workplace Readiness Questions:

Workplace Focused Family Literacy Plans

1. To what extend will using the four *Workplace Focused Family Literacy Plans* improve participants' and their children's specific skills as measured by the Foundation Skills Framework, GED curriculum skills, and PA Early Learning Standards?

   Data Sources:

   - Documentation of the process (workshop schedule, adaptations)
   - Student journals
   - Outcomes of the measures

2. To what extent will factors such as student input, "drawing the line," and the WFFL model impact a program developing its own work-place focused lesson plan(s)?

   Data Sources:

   - Documentation of the process
   - Flow chart
   - Student and staff journals
   - Interviews
   - The curriculum

Drawing the Line: Connecting Workplace Readiness to Individual Skills and Transfer to Life

1. To what extent will focusing instruction and reflection on the foundation skills framework increase awareness and/or transference of skills to the workplace, home, or community?

   Data Sources:

   - Lesson plans or video of class using the foundation skills and teacher reflection
   - Focus group or questionnaire about awareness of skills
   - Questionnaire or interviews about transfer of skills
   - Student journal entries about recognition and use of skills

2. To what extent will the use of High Priority Occupation (HPO) information in the classroom increase the number of learners who enter (or consider entering) the workforce?

   Data sources:

   - Lesson plan or video of class engaged in HPO discussion
   - Interviews or focus groups regarding student understanding of HPO and matching skills with them
   - Number of students investigating or entering HPO occupations

Doing the Deed: Project-Based Learning to Improve Workplace Readiness Skills

1. To what extent will incorporating project-based learning (name project) in the family literacy classroom increase the following Foundation Skills for our learners (name three)?

   Data sources: (Depends on project)

   - Student and staff assessment of increase in skills
   - Interviews or focus groups with students regarding transfer of skills from the class to the home or workplace
   - List of other skills students manifested

SEQUAL—PAR

Project Planning Form

Program Name:

Contact Name and email:

PIT members:

Region (circle one) East   Central   West

Question:

Intervention	Data Source	Expected Outcome

We will use these research and resource suggestions to guide our PAR project:

Step 3: Observing the Intervention

- Start your intervention(s).

- Collect data and analyze for each intervention. Reflect at monthly meetings.

- Change or add interventions if it doesn't seem that you are getting the results you want. (PAR is cyclical and evolving, so feel free to adjust as you go.)

- Bring in another person to your PIT, if necessary.

- Collect more data. Check progress.

- Monitor and evaluate the changes that occur and judge the quality of the changes. Note these.

- Document along the way. Keep journals. Keep all records.

- Decide when to stop collecting data and begin analyzing your data and reflecting on what it means.

- Keep these questions in mind as your work through your project:

    o Am I staying true to the initial plan? If not, why?

    o Am I collecting the data I said I would?

    o Am I keeping track of changes as we work through the project?

    o Is my PIT monitoring progress through regular meetings and meaningful conversations about our research project?

Step 4: The Reflection

Look at the data with your PIT. It's not enough to say, "It seems to be better." Studying the data and figuring out what they mean is ***the most important step***. Use these questions to guide your reflection.

- What do the data tell us? What were the results?

- Did our intervention(s) make a measurable difference?

- If so, did we meet/exceed our criteria for success?

- If not, how far were we from attaining them? What could we have done differently?

- What do these results mean? Did the changes accurately reflect what happened? Did something else happen to affect the outcomes?

- What will we continue to use in our program?

- What can we change to make this idea even better?

- What was less helpful that we can discard?

- How can we repeat this (or have others repeat it) to develop more validity for this intervention?

- What lessons should we share with the field?

Sharing Your Results-- Poster Show

Sharing progress at a poster show allows programs to highlight their success, learn from other projects, and get feedback on how to continue the project. Be creative with your poster! Use photos, documents, videos to showcase your work.

At minimum, the poster should include the following items:

- Your program and PIT
- Your question and why it was an area for program improvement
- The IPQ(s), Performance Standard(s), and/or "wonderings" that informed it
- Your intervention(s)
- Your methods for data collection
- Your results
- Your interpretation or analysis of the results
- Lessons you learned to be shared with the field

For practical advice on creating a poster show, see:

http://personal.psu.edu/drs18/postershow

APPENDIX A—Prior Research

ACIRI Research Suggestions

ACIRI
- References, pp. 137-141
- Appendix C, pp. 163-168 Helpful Books and Websites

Reading Rockets This website contains sections for parents, teachers, principals, librarians and other professionals. There are videos, tips, articles and other resources. Particularly useful are the reading tips for children. www.readingrockets.org

 Washington Learning System The developers of Language is the Key videos and materials, Washington Learning Systems, host a website with additional resources: newsletters, research information, video previews, free parent tool downloads, book suggestions. www.walearning.com

Practitioners' Guide to Interactive Literacy Activities
http://www.ed.psu.edu/goodlinginstitute/pdf/ILA_Guide.pdf

Goodling Annotated Bibliography
http://www.ed.psu.edu/goodlinginstitute/pdf/Research_Topic_A.pdf

National Institute for Literacy
http://www.nifl.gov/publications/publications.html
- *Shining Stars* series
- *Literacy Begins at Home: Teach Them to Read,*
- *The Effect of Family Literacy Interventions on Children's Acquisition of Reading)*

Family Literacy Discussion List (Gail Price, moderator)
NationalFamilyLiteracy-L-subscribe-request @ lists.psu.edu.

National Center for Family Literacy website
http://www.famlit.org

Appendix A—Prior Research

Workplace Readiness Suggestions (others?)

National Institute for Literacy, LINCS—Workforce Competitiveness Collection
http://www.nifl.gov/lincs/resourcecollections/RC_workforce.html
- *Facilitating Adult Learner Interactions to Build Listening and Speaking Skills*
- *Integrating Career Awareness into the ABE and ESOL Classroom*
- *An Introduction to ESL in the Workplace: A Professional Development Packet*
- *GED Career Bridge to Hospitality Curricula*
- *Under construction—Building Web Sites as a Project-Based Learning Activity for ABE/ESOL Classes: Tips for Teachers*
- *Embedded Learning Portal*
- *Innovative Strategies: Ideas that Work!*
- *Strategies for Success in Career Development: The Career Coach Curriculum Guide*
- *America's Perfect Storm: Three Forces Changing Our Nation's Future*

National Institute for Literacy Workforce Competitiveness Discussion List (Donna Bryan, moderator)
http://www.nifl.gov/mailman/listinfo/Workplace/

Project-based Learning (PBL)

- Knowledge in Action: The Promise of Project-Based Learning
  http://www.ncsall.net/?id=384
- Less Teaching and More Learning: Turning from traditional methods to project-based instruction, the author found that her students learned more
  http://www.ncsall.net/?id=385
- Building a Web Site in an ABE Class: Building a web site allowed everyone to demonstrate their skills
  http://www.ncsall.net/?id=298

<u>Drawing the Line</u>

- Articulating Learning with EFF Standards
  http://www.ncsall.net/?id=351

<u>Workforce Websites</u>

Pennsylvania's Workforce Statistics

http://www.paworkstats.state.pa.us/

The Center for Workforce Information and Analysis is Pennsylvania's designated provider of employment statistics. Their goal is to provide you with the most current data available to help you make the right decisions and assist in meeting your local planning needs.

O*Net Online

http://online.onetcenter.org/

"The O*NET program is the nation's primary source of occupational information. Central to the project is the O*NET database, containing information on hundreds of standardized and occupation-specific descriptors. The database, which is available to the public at no cost, is continually updated by surveying a broad range of workers from each occupation. Information from this database forms the heart of O*NET Online, an interactive application for exploring and searching occupations. The database also provides the basis for our Career Exploration Tools, a set of valuable assessment instruments for workers and students looking to find or change careers."

 National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

http://ncsall.net/

The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) is a federally funded research and development center focused solely on adult learning. NCSALL's efforts are dedicated to improving practice in educational programs that serve adults with limited literacy and English language skills, and those without a high school diploma.

Appendix B

METHODS FOR COLLECTING DATA

Try to have at least three methods for reliability (triangulation). Here are some suggestions.

E-data results: These correspond to your question/problem and the Performance Standards you were investigating. These would include, therefore, enrollment, retention hours, and educational gains for adults, GED, placement and retention in unsubsidized employment, etc.

Interviews or focus groups: These allow for interaction of the researcher with others. There are three categories:

Structured: Useful when seeking specific information on a specific topic, with little room for discussion. ("How many times last week did you do homework at home?")

Semi-structured: Involves asking more open ended questions, but allows the interviewee to go a bit further or provides some ideas they might not have thought about, using "probes." ("How did you learn about the program?" [Probes: friend, flyers, media]).

Open: Encourages more open discussion and room for wide-ranging opinions. ("In what ways has the program helped you grow as a learner?")

Questionnaires: Like the interviews/focus groups, questionnaires can be closed or open.

Closed: Likert Scale, multiple choice, short response, seeking specific information. Little room for interpretation

Open: Asks for opinions with respondent providing their own words. Can be difficult to analyze.

Document Analysis: Look at your and/or your participants' records, written reports, in-take forms, letters, memos, journal entries, portfolios, writings. Analysis of these can also provide a baseline or inspiration for an intervention.

Anecdotal Records: Written descriptive accounts of incidents, which are especially valuable for documenting classroom activity and behavior and are helpful in noting patterns.

Field Notes: Similar to anecdotal records, but also include the researcher's impressions and interpretations at the same time. Written on location.

Case Studies: A data collection method in which a single person, entity, or phenomenon is studied in depth over a sustained period of time and through a variety of data. The purpose of a case study "is to gather comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about each case of interest" (Patton, 1990, p. 384).

Logs: Careful records of recurring activities. Often numerical (e.g. attendance, time off task, computer use.) Commentary with the logs can be useful observational data.

Journals: Researchers keep reflections of the research process, which allow time to express feelings, anxieties, and ideas about the goings on. Journals are very useful at the reflection stage.

Portfolio: A collection of relevant materials compiled for a purpose.. Photos, papers, grades, minutes—anything relevant should be kept.

Audio and Video Recordings: Valuable for getting an exact record. Require permission.