

What is action research?

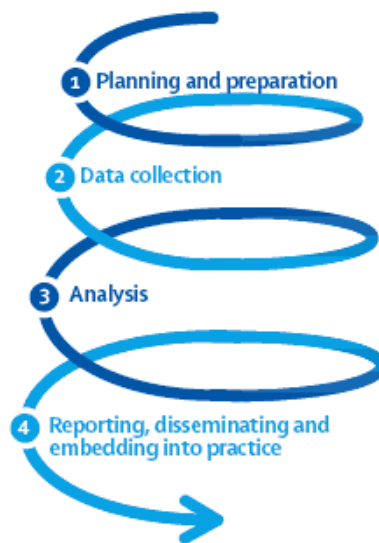


Figure 1: Action Research Cycles (taken from <http://www.scotland.gov.uk>)

‘There are two essential aims to action research:

- to *improve* and
- to *involve*.

Action research aims at improvement in three areas: first the improvement of *practice*; second the improvement of the *understanding* of the practice by its practitioners; and third, the improvement of the *situation* in which the practice takes place’.

(Carr and Kemmis, 1986. p165¹, original emphasis)

The Foundation is supporting practitioner-led action research because it has been shown to be a successful way for practitioners to conduct small-scale research projects to generate change and improve their practices based on the findings. It is called ‘practitioner-led’ to emphasise that the questions, the methods and the meaning of the results will be determined by practitioners. There may be academic or professional researchers involved in order to support the practitioners, but they do not lead the project. Instead, they may act as consultants to address any specific questions about research that the practitioners come up with in the course of their project, to alert participants to other existing research that may be useful, or may assist with analysing findings and editing reports.

The ‘action research’ term underlines the expectation that the findings of the research will influence teaching and learning practices in the classroom. They will be put into action! The research is not abstract or theoretical, but designed to look at real-life questions coming up in practitioners’ work. Sometimes practitioners will be surprised by their findings and at other times they will confirm what practitioners have understood intuitively, but in a more rigorous and systematic way.²

¹ Carr, W and Kemmis, S (1986) *Becoming Critical Education, Knowledge, and Action Research*, Falmer Press

²<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/12/15095637/16>