

Using Action Research for Professional Development

B. K PASSI

Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya, Indore, India

Abstract: *The author discusses various models of staff development; and proposes action research as a mechanism for continuing professional development.*

Introduction

This paper describes the use action research as a tool for professional development of staff. The content outlines are organised under six headings: Staff development, models of staff development, action research as a tool of professional development, introduction to action research, characteristic features of action research, and concluding remarks.

Staff Development

- Staff development is a continuous process, and is an organized activity. The primary objective of staff development is to make the staff more capable of engaging in joint ventures, improve standards of good practices, mutual criticism and commitment.
- Staff development programmes are intended mainly to improve the professional knowledge of staff, their skills and attitudes in order that they can do their work more effectively.
- We believe that professional development should deepen the knowledge, develop the skills and improve the value judgement.
- Staff development includes the professional development of all the personnel working under the system. The range includes academic, administrative as well as support personnel. It also includes additional groups viz., members of management committee, office administrators, library and laboratory staff, educational technology and media persons, health and physical instructors, transport staff, canteen staff and store keepers, counselors and nurses working in institutions, hostel wardens, and all those who are working for the institution.

Models of Staff Development

- Staff development is often under-valued and usually under-funded. It is mainly imparted for limited time-duration to a limited staff using piecemeal approaches.

- The major challenges to today's practitioners of education with minimum funds are. How to achieve a cultural shift from a teacher-centered model to a learner-centered model to a learner-centered process-oriented model? How to make the programme relevant and useful to actual workfield? How to find and choose effective models for staff development?
- There is need to systematize staff development programme using both face-to-face and distance mode.
- To systematize staff development programmes, practitioners have been using multiple models/approaches. Some of them are follows:
 - Portfolio approach (to develop field relevant competencies)
 - mentor model and peer coaching (highly experienced teachers play leadership role in guiding activities of other teachers)
 - Cooperative programmes for staff development (by providing shared responsibility for various tasks)
 - Integrated single campus model (holistic approach to all aspects and at all levels)
 - Collaborating decentralized multi-campus (collaborative role, facet/area specific study of chosen aspects).
 - Coordinated parking campuses (coordinated relevant parking campus having area specific strength)
 - Learning waves-informal groups (emerging focus emanate from the available and willing partners).
- The other models include MARS (Mass action research by school teachers) and OSSLORD (organizing self-directed self-help round table discussion). The model of action research, which every teacher needs to adopt, is worth discussing further.

Action Research as a Tool for Professional Development

- Professional development of staff can be possible if they are empowered to undertake action research. They can employ indigenous methodologies, identify self-generated resources, and find local solutions. There is a need to accord due recognition to the on-going contributions of the unrecognized work of staff.
- Action research constructs personal knowledge base which in turn can improve the quality of working processes.
- It develops a reasonable level of expertise among staff and create full faith in the research processes.
- It creates an atmosphere of self-reliance amongst the staff, and enhances their self-esteem.
- It invigorates the entire educational environment through self-driven research at the grass roots and gives a new lease of life.
- It helps the staff to become multi-skilled individuals as well as the members of a multi-skilled team.

- Also, helps the staff to improve their capability in hypothesizing the possible causes of a problem. It improves their critical and creative thinking ability (see fig. 1)

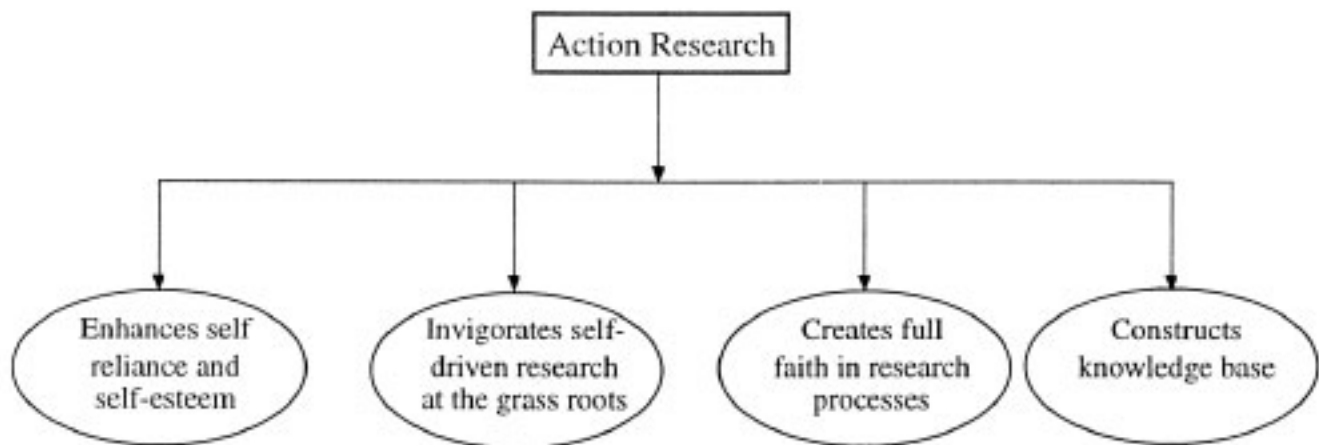


Fig. 1 : Action research for staff development

Introduction to Action Research

- It is the type of research which focuses on immediate actions in classroom and school settings. Here, the action researcher acts as a practitioner in which the researcher undertakes to solve immediate problems, and takes quick decisions for the improvement of existing practices.
- Action research is generally practice-based activity oriented generated from critical examination of experiences and practices. Here the conclusions and insights can be applied directly to the context from which they have arisen. They have direct relevance to the institutions (Ramakrishna and Prasad, 1990).
- We believe that all the staff in the education system are already engaged in informal research. They are confronted with innumerable problems related to the system of education, aspects of pedagogy, aspects of management and related aspects. Most of them continuously reflect upon them too. Some are constantly acting and resolving the problems and issues. Yet, almost none of them consider their effort worth documenting, sharing on a platform of research, etc. By giving them an option to do all this consciously, deliberately, with the confidence of a researcher, and giving them the necessary fraternal support, the empowerment process of the community could be kick-started in the right direction.
- Composition of the research teams should be flexible. Teams can also be formulated in association with national, state and local level agencies.
- Research areas can be decided locally by staff themselves. Research areas can encompass a range of problems starting from micro-problems of local magnitudes to macro-issues related to learners, teachers, administrators, parents, communities, and support personnel. Rural areas will arrive at a different set of research problems.
- Documentation of the findings and ideas emerging from such action research in various forms must be encouraged. And forums must be created at inter-school, inter-block, inter-district, and inter-state levels to enable the staff to share their experiences and ideas freely. The serious and definite outcomes of such research

can be published in journals and magazines and even reached out to policy planners.

Characteristic Features

The Characteristic features of action research may be summarised as follows (Fig. 2).

- *Situational*: To diagnose the problem in specific context and solve the problem in that context.
- It is undertaken to solve immediate problems and to take quick decisions.
- *Self-evaluative*: Modifications are continuously evaluated within the ongoing situation, the ultimate aim being to improve existing practices.
- It enables the researcher to achieve his/her purposes more effectively. It applies scientific thinking to real life problems.
- *Collaborative*: It is concerned with the 'team' of researchers and practitioners working together on a project.
- *Participatory*: It is implemented directly or indirectly by the researchers participatively



Fig. 2: Characteristic features of action research

Concluding Remarks

Knowledge construction is a special characteristic of rational human mind. It is facilitated by organized method of human endeavour. Undertaking action research is an organized method of human endeavour for the creation of new knowledge base. Some people may disagree about the action research undertaken by non-academic staff. They are of the opinion that the non-academic staff are engaged in file work and hardly have any knowledge about action orient about action research. Let the research process, research terminologies be demystified. initial findings maybe worse. But with the passage of time they may produce some fruitful results as well improve their working skills.

Reference

Ramaskrishna, C. P. and Prasad, V.S. (199) *Action Research Projects in Distance Education*, DEC, IGNOU, New Delhi.

Professor B.K. Passi is senior professor. Correspondence: Institute of Education, Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya, A.B. Road, Indore 452 001, India. Email:passibk@hotmail.com