

## **Action Research is always happening in the library**

The action research process is integrated into my teaching in many ways.

I participate in mini action research projects every week. Sometimes the action research process is an informal discussion of a students' progress with a colleague when co-teaching in the library. Sometimes I conduct action research on my own when I plan and evaluate lessons in the library. When I consider how and what I was thinking and how the students were thinking during a lesson it can guide my future lessons and help me to focus my teaching strategies. Whether the action research is completed in a formal manner or informally; the goal is the same. My change in practice should improve students' learning.

I learned a great deal about my teaching practice and how I can help students with literacy goals when I framed my Masters of Education thesis around action research. This was a formal way to complete action research. I spent time recording and reflecting how students learn and how I might teach differently to support my students' progress. Through this process I learned how to measure successes and weaknesses. It reshaped my teaching. When I gathered data around how the students were learning or struggling then I could see ways to alter my teacher strategies to become more effective.

Another formal way to complete action research with my peers is through our school community when we participate in the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) process. We identify an area to improve based on where students are struggling and plan how to incorporate a new teaching strategy to meet their needs. We then create pre and post assessment pieces to measure the effectiveness of our intervention. For example, our Grade 6 teachers used think-alouds to help students to better understand their reading purpose in all subject areas. Many of the teachers' students were reading superficially and weren't choosing appropriate reading strategies. By modeling with think-alouds they hoped students will recognize the reading strategy required to be successful when reading various texts. I helped gather the think-aloud prompts and frame our inquiry question. The grade 6 students answered their test questions more fully after they focused on the purpose of reading.

Another formal ways to use the action research model was during my participation in a T.L.L.P. (Teacher Leadership Learning Program) project. This is a jointly funded program with the Ministry of Education and the Ontario Teachers Federation. I led a team of four fellow teacher-librarians from the Simcoe County District School Board in a self-directed project to learn effective ways to integrate technology and critical thinking skills into our teaching. I was able to learn from peers outside of my school with this project. The T.L.L.P. process worked well because we were able to tailor our experience to our knowledge and our specific schools.

Most days my focus in the library is to teach critical thinking skills. I do this when I help to integrate critical thinking tasks into traditional lessons.

Here's an example of an inquiry activity completed with a Grade 1 class:

We asked the students to think critically about media. We looked at the Webkinz site and discussed its features as a whole class. The students were able to explain many of the activities and showed us teachers how to navigate around the site.

In the next session we looked at the website called Coco. It was created by the media awareness network <http://goo.gl/uL3sc>. This interactive game demonstrates the gimmicks used in advertising. As a whole class we identified the 5 gimmicks and then applied them to the Webkinz site. (Of course the webkinz site has all of the gimmicks discussed)

Finally, on their last day of co-teaching, the six year olds were given a checklist of the gimmicks on a slip of paper and asked to evaluate educational software on our network to see if they had the gimmicks. Students were then surveyed: What is the real purpose of Webkinz? What is the purpose of Millie's Math House? (or other chosen software on our school network)

Some of the students realized that Webkinz wants to sell you something. The students knew that the school software was created to help us learn.

We know we need to do more in this area because only a few students recognized the true purpose of the Webkinz site compared to our students' results with the same amount of teaching last year.

By conducting the survey and conferencing with their classroom teacher we have decided to continue working on making evaluations with the students to help them become more conscious consumers. I try to measure my effectiveness by reflecting back on our lessons and assessing students' progress to determine our next steps in the teaching continuum. Thus action research is cyclic. Our work on critical thinking isn't over. This kind of co teaching is part of my inquiry this year. If I help teachers to integrate critical thinking skills into their lesson then students will have more opportunity to practice being critical thinkers.

I feel that my expertise in the teaching of critical thinking skills have improved because of my involvement with action research projects. I will continue to strive to improve my practice and to give students opportunities to practice critical thinking skills. The action research model is a very good fit for my learning and I will continue to use it in my library with my students and colleagues.

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