

## *Action Research: What and Why*

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Action research is a transformational approach to professional learning that any educator can engage in alone or with others. It's a way of guiding your own learning around a student-centered dilemma that really matters, such that you will more quickly uncover solutions to your problems. It honors the intellect of teachers, invites us to rigorously and productively participate in our classrooms, and produces results.

When I started teaching sixth-grade humanities, I discovered that the majority of my students didn't like reading. I identified a simple and authentic question for my inquiry project: How can I get my students to love to read? I began my inquiry by seeking a deeper understanding of their attitudes. Without judgment and with only the intent to learn more, I interviewed students, conducted surveys, observed my students, and listened to them talk to each other. As I did this, I immediately got ideas about methods I could try the next day. Sometimes my research illuminated what I didn't know, and I sought out additional resources. As I implemented new routines and designed new lessons, my students' attitudes shifted and their skills improved.

Action research made me feel engaged in the classroom in a new way. Every day I learned something about teaching, and every day I could see positive changes in my students. I'd hear revealing comments from students like Vincent, who, at the start of Sustained Silent Reading, reached into his desk and said to Stephan, "When we came in this morning I saw this book on the shelves about deep sea creatures, and I snagged it," and I'd note that as a positive indicator of his attitude, as well as of the genre that he wanted to read. On the day that Anthony loudly expressed his dislike of reading—"It's so boring! What's the point?"—I thought, *Oh! That's a good question!* And I saw an opportunity to explore the purpose of reading, which became a lesson later that week.

Inquiry helped me know my class of sixth-grade students better than any I'd ever taught before. Paying acute attention to everything they said helped me appreciate and connect more fully with them. It also helped me see bright spots and successes. And, with my inquiry lens on, there was something to celebrate every day. I hadn't seen it when I focused on deficits and shortcomings. Action research showed me that if I paid attention to my students in the right way and listened to them carefully, I could find ways to help them make reading growth. This gave me a sense of power that I'd never felt before as a teacher, but had always yearned for.

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What thoughts come up for you as you read this description of my inquiry project?

How do you think action research could be useful to you?

When you think about teaching and your students, what would you like to know more about?

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