

Action Research Capstone

Introduction

Action Research can be defined as:

“Research carried out by practitioners with a view to improving their professional practice and understanding it better.” (OSU School of Education). This definition agrees with my action research project by using my technical background and knowledge as a resource to facilitate the integration of technology into the classroom. I have decided to detail and analyze a current project that I am involved with in my duties as the school district Technology Coordinator. I saw there was a need in our district for teachers to be more literate in computers. Many grant opportunities have brought technology infrastructure to the Oakridge School District in the form of new computers, servers, routers, and all the peripherals that go with it. This recent inflow of technology is indeed fortunate. However, the computers in each classroom are not used to their potential. Many teachers have not been properly trained to use, much less apply their computers in their classroom. So there is a natural and understandable fear that hinders the efficient use of computers.

Action Research Defined

Action Research is a process in which participants examine their own educational practice systematically and carefully using the techniques of research. It is based on the following assumptions:

- teachers and principals work best on problems they have identified for themselves;
- teachers and principals become more effective when encouraged to examine and assess their own work and then consider ways of working differently;
- teachers and principals help each other by working collaboratively;
- working with colleagues helps teachers and principals in their professional development.

(Caro-Bruce)

The Project

Last year, our district was fortunate to receive a \$10,000 grant that we designated for professional development in technology training. As the Technology Coordinator, I was tasked to plan, organize and implement a training program for all district staff. Through my course work, I have learned the value of student input in his or her own learning and because teachers' time is limited, I wanted to make sure to offer training that would be of interest to them. As my initial step in this action research project, I developed a survey

that was sent to all district staff. On the survey, each teacher was asked to respond by selecting his or her top three topics within technology (i.e. Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Internet, Research, Troubleshooting, Quick Books, Publisher, etc.). Teachers were also asked their preference of dates and times. "Teachers and principals work best on problems they have identified for themselves." (Caro-Bruce)

The next step of my action research project was to compile the results of the surveys and create classes. I was pleasantly surprised at the large number of respondents. After analyzing the data on the surveys, I developed several classes to meet the specific needs of the majority of the staff. To make sure I met everyone's needs, I also created several "open lab" days where individuals could come in and ask questions or receive assistance for specific issues or applications. After the class schedule was complete, I sent them out to the staff again so they could "register" for the classes they wanted. To make sure that staff actually went to the training sessions, a \$75 stipend was given out to take a class. The staff was ecstatic because they were getting paid to learn computer applications. All classes had enthusiastic turnouts (not unexpected) and were very happy that this training was finally happening within our district. "Teachers and principals become more effective when encouraged to examine and assess their own work and then consider ways of working differently." (Caro-Bruce)

I would also like to note the observations taken throughout my action research project. I enjoyed seeing teachers working together to solve problems that came up while they were working in the class. "Teachers and principals help each other by working collaboratively." (Caro-Bruce). Some teachers have commented how excited they were to be using their new knowledge about specific programs or techniques. The teachers were not the only students in my action research. I feel that this was a growth experience for me as a teacher as well. It was fun to work with my peers who were eager to learn. Each class presented new questions and challenges that I enjoyed solving with the teachers. "Working with colleagues helps teachers and principals in their professional development." (Caro-Bruce)

The final step of the action research project has not yet been completed. I plan on sending out follow-up surveys to the people who took my technology classes. This survey will include questions relating to instructor evaluation, format and suggestions for upcoming topics. The results will hopefully allow me to fine-tune my technology training classes in the future so as to better meet the needs of the staff. I feel that this reflection and self-assessment is valuable as both a student and an educator.

Conclusion

Based on the definition stated earlier, I agree that through teacher input, staff surveys, reflection and peer collaboration, action research is a critical piece in the puzzle of professional development. My job description dictates that I help people become more comfortable and proficient with technology. As a result of this training, I feel that I am on my way to achieving the goal to train the staff of this school district. By helping staff, they will in turn share their learned knowledge to students. The process of action research

has helped me reflect on the “how” and the “why” to achieving a particular goal. Some say the end justifies the means. I say the mean creates a positive end.

References

Caro-Bruce, C. "What is Action Research?" Classroom Action Research. Retrieved May 17, 2000 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.madison.k12.wi.us/sod/car/aris.html>.

OSU School of Education. "Capstone Activity for Action Research." 1998. [online] password protected. For more information: <http://osu.orst.edu/instruct/pte/superhom.htm>