

ACTION RESEARCH FOR TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Teachers are the most significant variable in determining the quality of education students receive and the amount of learning that occurs (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Yet, when it comes to discussions about how to enhance learning or improve the quality of education, this most significant variable is often ignored. To make this variable even more significant, there must be continued investment in teacher professional development. Action research can be an efficient and effective method to use in this regard. These modules will examine the following: (a) the process of becoming an expert reading teacher, (b) the basics of action research, (c) strategies for developing teacher expertise, and (d) proposals, products, and presentation for action research projects.

BEING AND BECOMING AN EXPERT READING TEACHER

It is naïve to think that a finished teaching product can be created in four semesters of any teacher preparation program. These programs instead provide the knowledge and skills for preservice teachers to begin their journey toward being and becoming skillful professionals and eventually, expert reading teachers. Toward this end, there are two necessary elements: developing knowledge and engaging in reflective analyses. Action research can be used to enhance both elements.

Knowledge

A body of knowledge is an essential component of being and becoming an expert in any domain (Sternberg & Williams, 2010). There are four kinds of knowledge necessary for teaching expertise: pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, content knowledge, and knowledge of learners and learning (Bruer, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1999; Eggen & Kauchak, 2007; Sternberg & Williams, 2010).

- **Pedagogical knowledge.** This is knowledge of general teaching strategies used to impart information, teach skills, or enhance learning in all subject areas. This include strategies such as cooperative learning, repeated reading, using advanced organizers, cloze, maze, problem-based learning in reading, using story grammar, inquiry for grammar instruction, using writing for word identification, and various forms of multi-level instruction. Expert reading teachers have a toolbox filled with an assortment of these strategies that can be used with a variety of students in a variety of situations.

- **Pedagogical content knowledge.** This is knowledge of teaching strategies used to teach specific content or skills. In this case, expert reading teachers know the best strategies for teaching reading.

- **Content knowledge.** This is a body of knowledge related to the subject matter that is to be taught. Expert teachers have subject area expertise. In this sense, reading teachers know a lot about the field of literacy, literacy research from a variety of fields, the brain functions during reading, the process of creating meaning with print, and literacy learning. This body of knowledge guides the expert reading teacher in deciding what is taught and in what order.

- **Knowledge of learners and learning.** This is knowledge of the learning process, learning theories, and human development as it relates to social, emotional, intellectual, moral, and personal development. Expert reading teachers know about their students and how students best learn to read and write.

Reflection

Reflection is also a necessary element in being and becoming an expert teacher (Darling-Hammond, 2008; Noormohammad, 2014; Sternberg & Williams, 2010; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Reflection occurs during the teaching episode in what is called formative reflection. It also occurs after the teaching episode in what is called summative reflection. Reflective thinking occurs on three levels:

Level 1: Teaching effectiveness. Effective teachers reflect to assess learning outcomes (Porter, Youngs, & Odden, 2001; Sadker, Sadker, & Zittleman, 2008). They examine the teaching episode in order to identify those things that worked well and those things that could have been done differently.

Level 2: Research, research-based practices, or research-based theories. Decisions made by expert teachers are grounded in established theory and research-based practices (Porter, Youngs, & Odden, 2001; Stanovich & Stanovich, 2003). These teachers pause to examine their teaching practice to see if what they are doing aligns with a body of research and research-based theory related to teaching and learning. Of course, it is hard to reflect at this level if you have nothing upon which to reflect. Thus, you can see the importance of having sufficient knowledge in each of the four areas above.

Level 3: Values and philosophy. Teaching at the highest level requires teachers pause to consider if what they are doing is in harmony with their personal and professional values and their philosophy (Dewey, 1934). Teacher reflection at this level is based on the premise that you can identify a set of values and a teaching philosophy. While Level 3 reflection is important, the focus of this module is on Levels 1 and 2.