Chapter 9

CHAPTER 9 Organizer

Sharing and Reflecting

Communicating the results of action research

Local presentations

Action research communities

Professional conferences

Academic journals

Electronic dissemination
In Chapter 1, we discussed the gap that exists between what is learned as a result of researchers—typically university professors or others trained as researchers—who conduct and report their research on educational topics and the needs of practicing classroom teachers. In an effort to reduce this gap between theory and research and actual practice, it is imperative for practitioner-researchers to share the results of their action research projects. A wide variety of options exist for practitioner-researchers to share their research, ranging from local presentations to professional conferences and academic journals. In addition, there are numerous electronic means for communicating the results of action research. Although both Chapters 8 and 9 address issues related to publishing or otherwise disseminating the results of your action research studies, it is important to note that the focus of the present chapter is on the big picture—namely, presenting and discussing alternatives for sharing your action research. In contrast, Chapter 8 was more technical, focusing on the how-to of writing up your action research studies. After presenting information on these various alternatives for disseminating research results in this chapter, I will once again reiterate the importance of professional reflection as part of this process.

COMMUNICATING THE RESULTS OF ACTION RESEARCH

For quite some time, a gap has existed between research conducted in the broad field of education and the ultimate and
supposed users of that research (i.e., teachers or other educational practitioners). In Chapter 1, this gap was described as follows: Educational research tends to occur in the ivory towers of higher education, whereas the practical application (i.e., the education of children) takes place in schools and classrooms. What goes on in public school classrooms often does not reflect research findings related to instructional practices and student learning (Johnson, 2008).

Research is routinely written and published in a way that does not consider a teacher’s typical day-to-day schedule. The resulting research articles are often overly descriptive and highly technical and utilize research methods that do not fit with the daily needs of and resources available to teachers (e.g., they use true experimental designs, complete with random selection and assignment, or highly labor-intensive and longitudinal data collection methods). The research findings do not appreciate or often take into account teachers’ points of view or factor in the practical challenges teachers must address in their classrooms on a daily basis. This has been alluded to numerous times throughout the book: In a manner of speaking, the practitioner-researcher—through the act of designing and conducting action research studies—becomes the missing link between the theoretical researchers and the practicing educators.
However, simply conducting an action research project will not automatically facilitate the reduction of this gap. Sharing the results—either formally or informally—is the real activity that helps bridge the divide between research and application. Communicating your results lends credibility to the process of conducting action research because teachers and others in the education profession tend to see this process as one that gives teachers a voice. Suddenly, research is not far removed from the classroom; they have, in a way, become one. Research is no longer an isolated activity, separate from the instructional process. It has become an integrated process such that the advantages of research (e.g., research designs, data collection methods, validity, and reliability) and the advantages of teachers’ “voices” (e.g., knowing about the instructional process, having familiarity with teachers’ day-to-day schedules, resource availability, and time constraints) can be realized in concert with one another. Perhaps more important, the act of sharing, communicating, or otherwise disseminating the results of your action research allows other educators to see this as well.

Not only does sharing the results of teacher-led action research projects with members of the teaching profession help narrow the gap between theory/research and practice; it also provides the practitioner-researcher with the opportunity to gain additional insight into the topic under investigation as well as into the research process itself (Mills, 2011). If at the outset of your study you believed that the topic you had decided to investigate was an important one and in fact worthy of studying, in all likelihood there are other teachers, administrators, counselors, and so on who would feel the same way and would also be interested in your findings. This act of sharing—and, in fact, celebrating—the findings of your action research can actually be a very satisfying and rewarding professional experience (Mills, 2011). There is a tendency for practitioner-researchers to feel intimidated at the thought of presenting or publishing their research, almost to the point of outwardly resisting the notion. As human beings, none of us likes to feel the wrath of our critics. However, I would strongly encourage you to take this next step in the action research process. Regardless of the types of reactions garnered by communicating your results, whether they be unfavorable or overwhelmingly positive, you will almost certainly experience professional growth.

Also, by sharing and disseminating your action research, you also encourage others to engage in these types of activities in their own classrooms. I’ve worked with countless teachers who’ve said that they simply don’t know how to do these types of things or simply don’t have the time. Seeing colleagues with whom they work do it might just encourage them to try it as well. Educator empowerment can be contagious!

Locally

There are several possible audiences for local presentations of your research, but probably none will be more interested than your colleagues (Johnson, 2008). More than anything, these presentations tend to promote professional discussion among teachers, counselors, and principals. These types of discussions are essential for facilitating professional reflection and growth in the teaching profession (Johnson, 2008). Do not become concerned about the notion of a full-blown presentation; it may not be necessary.
These “presentations” may run the gamut from formal to informal. They may take the form of a formal teacher in-service session, a brief talk at a regularly scheduled faculty meeting, or perhaps an ongoing discussion among teachers within a school. Regardless of the level at which the presentation occurs, Johnson (2008) recommends that your audience of colleagues will tend to find your presentation more interesting if you keep it brief and focused and include only the details that other teachers might find helpful in their classrooms.

I would also strongly urge you to use some sort of visual aids to assist you in your presentation. Most of our students—regardless of the age or grade level at which we teach—do not like to simply be talked to or at; your colleagues will probably also appreciate visuals that increase the quality of your presentation and keep their attention. These visual aids might include overhead transparencies with a bulleted outline of your discussion, a handout of your major points and results, or perhaps even a technology-enhanced presentation using such software as PowerPoint or Keynote. The main aspects of a presentation should include the following:

1. **Background information.** Briefly summarize the literature review you conducted, trying not to mention everything you read. Simply mention three or four key aspects of your review, focusing on anything that provided you guidance in your study.

2. **Purpose of your study.** Share with your audience why you chose to study what you did. What personal experience led you to this topic? What were you trying to find out as a result of your study? Try to make a compelling argument for why your topic was worth investigating.

3. **Methodology employed.** Briefly describe the methodology used, focusing on the data you collected and how you collected them.

4. **Results.** This portion of your research presentation along with Numbers 5 and 6 below should constitute the majority of the time you have for your presentation. The results, along with your conclusions and action plan, are the aspects that your colleagues will be most interested in learning about. Tell your audience what you discovered by succinctly describing your findings. This may be an excellent time to use visuals, such as tables, graphs, or charts, if appropriate.

5. **Conclusions.** Share with your colleagues what you think your results mean. How do your results relate back to the original purpose of your study? What kinds of implications (i.e., for practice) can you draw from your conclusions?

6. **Action plan.** Based on your results and conclusions, describe what you plan to do from this point forward, in terms of both practice and future cycles of your action research. You may want to seek additional input from your colleagues regarding your action plan.

7. **Questions and answers.** Finally, always be sure to leave at least a few minutes for questions and answers. This is yet another opportunity for professional discussion and reflection.
Another possible audience for your presentations is an audience consisting of your district’s administration. This includes members of the school board, the superintendent, the assistant superintendent, directors of curriculum and instruction, directors of special education services, and so on as well as building-level administrators (i.e., principals, assistant principals, deans of students, etc.). Often, district-level decisions regarding teaching and learning are made apart from considering any research related to them. Johnson (2008) believes that this can result in bad educational practice or perhaps even educational malpractice. The results of action research can be used as an effective means of enabling your school or district to make educational decisions that are better informed. These decisions then are based on actual data collected, as opposed to being based on hunches or simply on what “looks good” to those making the decisions.

Action Research Communities

Along similar lines of sharing action research with audiences local in nature is the concept of creating action research communities. An action research community can be defined as a professional learning community made up of educational professionals driven by a common goal of practicing reflective teaching as a means of improving classroom instructional practice or other aspects of the educational process. Generally speaking, professional learning communities (PLCs) are composed of educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for students they serve (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). They are based in the notion that the key to improved student learning is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators. This notion is similar to what James, Milenkiewicz, and Bucknam (2008) refer to as “communities of practice,” or CoPs (p. 202).

The term “professional learning community” has been used to denote so many different types of activities that there continues to be a lack of clarity among the educational community. It has been used to describe grade-level teams, school committees, a content area department, an entire school building, or an entire school district (Baccellieri, 2010). In my opinion, the “level” of the learning community is not important, provided several important criteria are met. DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) describe six key characteristics of PLCs. At a minimum, they should include:

- a shared mission, vision, values, and goals all focused on student learning;
- a collaborative culture;
- a collective inquiry into best practices and current reality;
- an action orientation or learning by doing;
- a commitment to continuous improvement; and
- an orientation focused on results and not on intentions.

Note that the fourth item on this list—that is, “an action orientation”—essentially delineates the integration of action research into the culture of a collaborative group of professional
educators. Another key characteristic of PLCs is that innovation and experimentation are not viewed by the members of the PLC as tasks or projects to be completed but rather as ways of conducting day-to-day business forever (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). PLCs have become extremely valuable approaches to initiating and sustaining school improvement and reform (Baccellieri, 2010).

Action research communities can be established within an individual school building or school district but can also “branch out” to include multiple buildings or even perhaps multiple districts (typically within a relatively small geographic area). These can be very meaningful professional development organizations, not only for sharing the results of action research but also for lending encouragement and support to teachers during just about any stage of the action research process. In addition, they can play an important role in the process of experienced teachers serving as mentors to novice teachers. These types of formal “learning communities” can provide significant levels of professional support. They can offer opportunities for both formal and informal sharing and reflecting on classroom teaching practice. Communities can be set up within a formal structure—perhaps with monthly meetings—or can be less formal. In the case of the latter, meetings might occur on an “as needed” basis. This idea of “grassroots professional development” represents a substantial shift in mind-set for many educators. Historically, district-level administrators have made decisions about what they believe their teachers should receive in the form of professional development opportunities. Furthermore, those decisions typically operate under a “one-size-fits-all” model, meaning that all teachers in a building, for example, require the same kinds and levels of continuing training in order to effectively deliver instruction, assess student learning, and so forth. In my opinion, this practice has been shown to be highly ineffective. Additionally, it has only served to alienate teachers from the process of determining and providing what each feels is needed to help them grow professionally (Mertler, 2010).

In contrast, professional development that is grounded in a process of individualized reflection can only be more meaningful to individual educators. In other words, when educators—either individually or collectively—reflect on their professional practice and identify areas in which they believe they need additional training, they tend to feel a much more vested interest in that training. Perhaps more important, they develop ownership over an entire process—that is, implementing action research by reflecting on practice, identifying an area in need of improvement, and engaging in a process designed to improve the particular area—of professional development. To me, this notion is really the epitome of customized professional development.

Developing PLCs that formally integrate action research into the process can result in numerous positive outcomes. These include the fact that a collaborative approach to systematically improving educational practice and formally connecting theory to practice can be incredibly empowering for educators at all levels. Educators develop skills and abilities to make well-informed decisions about their own practice. Furthermore, the PLC/action research approach provides opportunities for educators to effectively increase their knowledge and positively affect their practice and can do so by focusing on what they see as their own particular professional development needs (Mertler, 2009). A process of reflecting on one’s own practice as a means of answering questions about that practice or...
of investigating issues related to that practice enables educators to customize their own professional development. The bottom line is that educators who engage in this integrated process experience professional growth that is specifically related to their own areas of professional interest.

All of this being said, the integrated PLC/action research approach is not without its limitations. First and foremost, it requires a shift in mind-set or perhaps even in philosophy. This certainly constitutes an approach in complete opposition to the standard top-down, administrator-driven leadership models (Mertler, 2009). In a manner of speaking, the locus of control shifts away from the principal's office, providing educators with a much-needed voice in their own practice. Many educators—from the classroom teacher to the district superintendent—may experience a great deal of difficulty making this shift. Additionally, for those who desire such a shift in mind-set, time and resources must be made available to them.

However you and your fellow colleagues decide to structure your action research community, I strongly encourage its use as you will likely view it as an important part of your ongoing professional development as an educator.

**Professional Conferences**

Local presentations are certainly acceptable outlets for presenting research and are typically beneficial to the practitioner-researcher from the local point of view. However, sharing your research among a much broader community of educators provides even greater opportunities for professional dialogue, reflection, and brainstorming. Professional conferences are wonderful environments for communicating the results of research, sharing ideas for future cycles of action research, and networking with other educators who have similar research interests. Professional conferences are typically sponsored by state, regional, or national organizations and are usually held annually. The organization releases a call for proposals anywhere from 4 to 10 months in advance of the conference. Included in the call is a description of everything you need to include in your proposal. The proposal usually consists of a three- to four-page summary of your study. Once you have submitted it to the organization, it is sent out to other professional educators for a blind review, meaning that they do not know who the authors are at the time they review it. They review your proposal based on a preestablished set of criteria and either recommend it for inclusion in the conference program or not. If it is accepted, you receive notice a couple of months in advance of the conference in order to have time to prepare your research report and presentation. The seven main aspects to include in a presentation that were provided in the previous section also apply to presentations made at professional conferences. Depending on the nature and size of the professional conference, you will likely have anywhere from 15 to 75 minutes to present your study. If you are not familiar with professional conferences in your areas of interest, a search of the Internet will lead you to the websites of various organizations, which typically include links to information about their conferences. I am a big supporter of presenting research studies at professional conferences, as they can truly open the door to so many new opportunities and ideas!
The notion of presenting your original research at a conference of professional educators can be a bit overwhelming and a little unnerving, especially for the first-time presenter. However, there are usually options for the format of your presentation. There are typically three formats for conference presentations:

- Paper presentations
- Symposia or panel presentations
- Poster presentations

As the name implies, a “paper presentation” means that you write a complete action research report (as was discussed in Chapter 8) and then develop from it a presentation using some type of presentation software (e.g., PowerPoint, Keynote, or Prezi). Most paper presentations last anywhere from 10 to perhaps 30 or 40 minutes, depending on how the concurrent session is structured. Some conferences are encouraging a newer type of presentation, called “PechaKucha 20x20” (http://www.pechakucha.org). PechaKucha (which means “chit-chat” in Japanese) is a simple presentation format where you show 20 images, each for 20 seconds, so that your entire presentation lasts 6 minutes and 40 seconds. The images advance automatically as you talk along to the images. This format forces you to be brief and concise in your comments (6 minutes and 40 seconds is not a long time nor is 20 seconds per slide!), while allowing you to cover a lot of ground (i.e., 20 slides) in the time frame. It forces you to think strategically about your presentation, in order to highlight and discuss only the most salient points. Also, note that the focus of the slides is not on text but rather on images that are discussed by the presenter.

A symposium or panel presentation is typically characterized by several individuals (perhaps five to seven people) presenting on the same topic but who provide unique or different perspectives on that topic. These can last anywhere from 60 to 120 minutes, depending on how they might be structured at a given conference. A good deal of thought must go into the development of a symposium or panel, so that it has an organization to it and that multiple perspectives are presented. After all, it might not be beneficial to hear five individuals discuss the exact same thing. For example, I recently participated on a panel presentation at a high school on the topic of academic plagiarism. There were five individuals on the panel, with one person discussing each of the following topics: (1) the legal aspects of plagiarism, (2) plagiarism in high school academics, (3) plagiarism in college/university academics, (4) the effects of plagiarism on job/career prospects, and (5) ways to avoid plagiarism.

A final type of presentation format—which might be very appealing to the novice conference presenter—is a poster presentation. Posters are typically presented as a session in a large room with tables, where each presenter sets up either a flat or a tri-fold board. On the board, the researcher assembles summarizations of various aspects of the study (i.e., think back to a science fair presentation). An example of a research study presented in a poster session at a conference is shown in Figure 9.1. Conference attendees meander through the room, reading the posters and interacting—in a question-and-answer format—with the researchers. This presentation format tends to be much less stressful, because of its less formal nature and its conversational style.
District-Level Action Research Conferences

Similar to larger professional conferences—but perhaps a little less intimidating and a bit more meaningful—is the notion of district-level action research conferences. If your district promotes school- or districtwide action research as an integral part of the professional culture (implying that numerous educators might be simultaneously conducting action research projects), then providing a forum for those educators to share their findings and experiences serves as a potentially powerful mechanism for professional sharing, reflection, and future action planning as well as for professional development in general. These types of conferences tend to be less intimidating because all of the presenters come from the same school or district. Furthermore, they tend to be more meaningful because of the fact that the action research topics (e.g., educational programs, interventions, curricula) being shared have taken place within the district where all conference presenters and attendees work. The presentations, therefore, tend to be more “personal,” meaning that conference participants can more easily relate to and apply the action research being disseminated. Several districts—as well as universities and colleges of education—throughout the United States routinely conduct such conferences.
Academic Journals

Since academic journals have the potential to reach larger audiences than professional conferences can, you may want to consider submitting your study to a journal in your particular field—one that focuses on the topic you studied or that focuses broadly on classroom-based action research. Similar to proposals submitted to conferences, academic journals are also refereed, meaning that any study submitted receives a blind, peer review by a minimum of two reviewers who provide comments on the quality of the study as well as on the written manuscript detailing the study. Typically, comments provided by reviewers are both positive and constructive. Good reviewers will provide complimentary feedback about the good things done in the study. They will also provide suggestions for improving the quality of the manuscript. Their final comment is usually a recommendation to publish the paper or not. There are usually three types of recommendations:

1. **Accept as is.** If your paper receives this recommendation, no revisions are necessary. The paper is ready to be published in its current form. This type of recommendation is seldom given by any reviewer.

2. **Accept with revisions** (also referred to as conditionally accept). This is a much more typical recommendation for well-written papers of well-conducted studies. Almost every paper accepted for publication in an academic journal will require some revisions.

3. **Reject.** If your study had substantial methodological flaws or if the research paper was written poorly or simply not written clearly, perhaps because you did not pay attention to common stylistic conventions of academic writing (see Chapter 8), you may receive this recommendation. If this occurs, try not to become too discouraged—it happens to all of us! Consider taking the feedback provided by the reviewers, revising your paper, and submitting it to another journal. Sometimes when a manuscript is rejected, the editors may suggest that you “revise and resubmit” the paper. This may occur when the paper is poorly written and may need a complete reworking, but the topic may be of great interest to the readers of the journal.

As an example of this process, in Figure 9.2 I have included a copy of a letter that I received from a journal editor whose recommendation was to “conditionally accept” my manuscript. You will also notice that, as I made revisions to the final version of the manuscript, I marked off each suggested revision appearing in the letter. Although this process can be a bit intimidating at first—and can create anxiety throughout one’s professional career!—receiving this type of feedback and specific comments on your action research studies and then having the opportunity to revise your manuscript accordingly is one of the best ways to improve your writing (Johnson, 2008).

Mills (2011) offers some sound guidelines to keep in mind when considering submitting your study to a journal, many of which you read about in Chapter 8. First, it is important that you peruse the journal(s) that you are considering for your submission(s). Realize that the articles you are reading represent those that have been accepted for publication. Pay
Dear Dr. Mertler:

On behalf of the Editorial Board, I am pleased to report that your manuscript is conditionally accepted for publication in American Secondary Education. Reviewers felt that the article dealt with a timely topic that “has not been emphasized enough in the literature” and that it was “professionally crafted.” To prepare it for publication, however, please address the following issues:

1. The article could be strengthened through an increased attention to audience. Although the topic of assessment is clearly one of general interest, the article should make some reference to the relevance of the topic for secondary educators since that is the focus of this journal. Similarly, the discussion should include some implications for the secondary teachers and administrators who read the journal as well as some suggestions for researchers.

2. One reviewer felt that the Conclusions should include a discussion of why preservice and inservice teachers score differently in their highest category. Another felt that some reference should be made to the testing emphasis in No Child Left Behind. Do you recommend more preservice instruction, or do you believe that the emphasis should shift to “on-the-job” learning—perhaps through ongoing professional development?

3. Reviewers raised a number of questions about the design and reporting of the study:
   - Clarify participants’ characteristics
   - Add a table with frequencies by item or at least by aggregated items by standard
   - Describe what “correct” means on the scale (congruency with the standards?)
   - Address the low reliability coefficient for inservice teachers as a limitation of the study. Should it be used in future research?
   - Address psychometric properties of your modified instrument since it is different from the original.

(Continued)
Cite some support for the assertion that the “trend is changing” away from an emphasis on standardized testing in teacher preparation (p. 17).

The section of the results on page 17 that talks about “5 of the 35 items” etc. is rather confusing. Readers cannot see what those items said, and the relevance of this finding to the research questions is unclear. Suggestion 2. above might help, or you might just omit it.

4. The organization of the article could be tightened to reduce redundancy
   - Eliminate the introduction on page 2. The points made in that section are all made in the literature review. The Rogers article cited in this section may also be too old to be used as a basis for stating that there is currently a problem.
   - Begin instead with the definition of assessment literacy and explanation of the seven standards.
   - Omit Tables 1 and 2 since most of the information they contain is included in Table 3. It seems that the three could be combined into one.

5. Please note that APA format calls for consistent use of the past tense in the literature review. Also, try to reduce the use of passive voice (e.g., “Stiggins provided a similar description” rather than “A similar description was provided by Stiggins”).

You may return your revised manuscript on a 3.5 disk in Microsoft Word. Also, please complete and return the enclosed Copyright Assignment Form. American Secondary Education cannot publish your article unless it holds exclusive rights to the article.

Thank you for considering the American Secondary Education journal.

Sincerely,

James A. Rycik
Editor
JAR/gv

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close attention to the writing style as well as the structure and format of the articles themselves. Do not feel that you have to copy the particular format and style; rather, use them as guides for your paper as you prepare it for submission. Second, it is suggested that you use a clear, reader-friendly writing style. Action research should be written up using straightforward language and vocabulary. Do not try to impress your readers with flowery language or
polysyllabic words, especially when their use is not necessary. Let your data and your interpretations of those data speak for themselves. You should strive to make your paper readable and understandable not only by those who are knowledgeable about your topic but also by those who are not. Third, Mills suggests that you develop a paper that guides your readers to the site at which your study occurred. Provide a description of the setting, the participants, the length of the study, and the focus of your investigation. Fourth, you should also include a brief description of what you actually did in the course of your study. Focus on explanations of your research design, data collection, data analysis, and ultimate interpretations. Also, do not forget to attend to other various data collection considerations, such as validity, reliability, and ethics regarding your participants. Finally, it is critical that you make every effort to keep your readers’ attention. Granted, academic journal articles of classroom-based teacher research will probably never make a best-seller list, but that does not mean that they cannot be interesting and rewarding to read. Enjoyable and engaging reading does not have to be mutually exclusive in academic writing, but it does take some effort on the part of the author.

There are several journals—all of which are refereed—whose articles focus on classroom-based, teacher-conducted research. This list of journals includes the following:

- Action Research
- Action Research International
- Educational Action Research
- Networks: An Online Journal for Teacher Research
- Reflective Practice
- Teaching & Learning: The Journal of Natural Inquiry & Reflective Practice
- The Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
- The Ontario Action Researcher

More information about these journals, including information available at their websites, has been included in the Related Websites section appearing later in this chapter.

Sharing Results Electronically

More and more opportunities are being created for teachers to share the results of their research electronically, especially in various online environments. There are various types of electronic media in which results can be shared or ideas exchanged. Before I discuss them, however, let me offer a word of caution. The Internet can be a wonderful place to find information and materials that one might not have access to otherwise. However, it is important to be cautious about information and research results that you read online. There exists a common misconception that if something is “published” (that is to say, if it appears in print), it must be important, meaningful, and of high quality. Just because something appears in print—even if it is refereed—does not necessarily mean that it is of substantial quality. It is important to be a critical consumer of anything you read online.
One of the nicer aspects of sharing research and ideas online is that teachers can be provided with the sense that the world is a much smaller place and that input and feedback are readily accessible from literally all corners of the globe. Online resources typically fall into one of three categories: action research websites, electronic mailing lists, and electronic journals (Mills, 2011). We will briefly look at each of these, although additional information—including URLs for various websites—appears in the Related Websites section.

Numerous action research websites are available on the Internet. These sites are sponsored and hosted primarily by institutions and individuals in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Most of them offer a variety of features, including electronic journals, electronic discussion boards, print as well as electronic action research resources, and links to other action research sites. The sites featured later in this chapter include the following:

- Action Research at Queen’s University
- Action Research Resources
- Educating as Inquiry: A Teacher/Action Research Site
- EmTech’s Action Research Page
- Teacher Research

In addition to worldwide websites, many school districts are also developing and hosting their own action research webpages on district websites. The specific purpose of these sites is to allow teachers in their particular districts to share their results of action research, primarily districtwide; although with the Internet, dissemination would not be limited only to members of that district. As a concrete example of this relatively new electronic means of sharing action research, let me highlight one district’s efforts. On several occasions throughout this book (primarily in the Related Websites sections at the end of various chapters), the Madison (Wisconsin) Metropolitan School District has been featured.

The district’s action research website (http://oldweb.madison.k12.wi.us/sod/car/carhome page.html) includes links to all types of helpful information related to conducting classroom-based action research. One link in particular (http://oldweb.madison.k12.wi.us/sod/car/search.cgi) takes you to a searchable index of abstracts of action research studies conducted by its teachers from 1990 through 2009. Several of the abstracts also include links to the complete research papers written by the teachers themselves. This is an absolutely wonderful outlet for teacher-conducted action research projects as well as a very valuable resource for teachers’ professional development. If your district does not currently have such a means for locally (and more broadly) sharing the results of your action research, pursuing such an opportunity with district-level administrators may be time well spent for the benefit of all teachers in your district. Another example of a school that maintains its own action research website is Highland Park High School (http://hphs.dist113.org) in Highland Park, Illinois. The school’s Action Research Laboratory page (http://hphs.dist113.org/Academics/Pages/ActionResearch.aspx) contains more than 25 complete action research reports and presentations written by Highland Park teachers and administrators.

An electronic mailing list is an online discussion forum conducted via e-mail, typically located on a large computer network and hosted by a university (Mills, 2011). Electronic mailing lists provide opportunities to participate in discussions on a wide variety of
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topics within a given field (e.g., action research) with individuals from all over the world. Information and links to several of them are included in the sites listed above. If you subscribe to an electronic mailing list, you should be aware that you will likely receive several e-mail messages per day on one or more discussion topics, known as “discussion threads.” The messages can add up quickly if you do not check your e-mail on a regular basis. Although it can be interesting and educational to simply sit back and read the various postings to an electronic mailing list, do not hesitate to post your own questions or ideas; electronic mailing lists tend to be very collaborative and collegial environments. I have been able to offer suggestions to members of an electronic mailing list as well as to seek their advice for my own projects. In addition, I have been able to establish several professional relationships over the years with individuals who have interests similar to mine by doing just that. These are individuals with whom I likely would never have come into contact had it not been for the electronic mailing list.

Finally, the Internet has also enabled publishers to put entire journals online. Over time, more and more full-text, refereed practitioner-researcher electronic journals are becoming available online. Several of the journals listed earlier in this chapter are entirely electronic or online journals, including *Action Research International*, *Educational Action Research*, *Networks: An Online Journal for Teacher Research*, and *The Ontario Action Researcher*. These electronic journals make the submission process relatively painless, since the manuscripts are typically submitted electronically via e-mail as attachments. Furthermore, the turnaround time from submission to (hopefully) publication tends to be several months less, simply because of the technology involved. Another benefit of these electronic journals can be experienced by the practitioner-researcher as a consumer of action research. Electronic journals make access to teacher research articles much easier. Since they are available in full-text format, one does not even have to travel to a local university library and make a photocopy of the article, as was necessary in the past and still is for print journals. The articles are usually available in HTML or PDF formats and can therefore easily be saved to a hard drive or computer disk or printed out. The fact that nearly all of these online action research journals are only a few years old serves as an indication of the extent to which teacher research is truly a field that is experiencing a great deal of growth and that is creating progressively more interest across the broad field of education.

**A Word About Ethics When Sharing the Results of Action Research**

I want to briefly reiterate the importance of the ethical behavior and practice of action researchers, as was discussed more extensively in Chapter 8. Recall that, as a researcher, your ethical responsibilities include not fabricating or falsifying any data or results and protecting the confidentiality and anonymity of your participants (whether they be children or adults). When presenting the results of your action research studies, be sure to limit your descriptions of individuals or settings so that they are not easily identifiable. In addition, avoid mentioning names of participants or settings (i.e., specific schools, districts, or other educational institutions). If appropriate, you might consider using pseudonyms in place of actual names. This sometimes helps in the flow of your presentation. However, I would advise that, as a further extension of your ethical behavior, you inform your audience that the names you are using are, in fact, pseudonyms. This will reduce the potential for members of your audience to think that you are revealing actual names, and it will add to your credibility as an action researcher.
Recognizing that there is an incongruency between my teaching beliefs and my teaching practice is the first step. I now wish to explore several options that should help me facilitate better teacher-student communication in my classroom. Some of these are the following: giving written directions so students can refer to them during the lesson as needed; providing students with an outline, covering important points in the lesson; asking questions that promote thinking, relating questions to students’ previous experiences; and encouraging students to talk freely amongst themselves in groups.

Conducting this study has given me insight into my classroom. I now realize that students come to class with a sense of inquiry. They are ready to explore and find answers on their own. I feel students are excited about engaging in the process of science, and they show this by their willingness to share ideas and beliefs with others. It is my job to step back and trust this sense of student inquiry. By not monopolizing the classroom I feel I can now provide rich opportunities for students to investigate the world of middle school science at a much deeper level than ever before.


One of my primary focuses for this study was to carefully choose my groups so that they were clearly heterogeneous from both an academic and cultural standpoint. Another main focus was to assign specific roles or jobs within the groups so that each member would be perceived as a valued player. The roles worked, and were also designed to make the group members more dependent on each other and less dependent on the teacher. However, according to the respondents of Kathy’s survey, 92% indicated that they would have changed their jobs if they could. When the jobs were assigned, the intent was to “bring out” the very behaviors that were not being observed. For example, when one student was observed as being passive and unsmiling, we assigned her the job of Principal Investigator to bring out more assertive behavior in her. All of the roles were assigned to all of the students with similar objectives in mind. Perhaps allowing the students a part in the decision making for jobs would be a good idea next time.
Cooperative group learning is much more than just putting students in groups and giving them assignments to complete. In doing this study, I set higher expectations of my students than I ever had before. The conceptual learning and creative problem solving that took place was clearly indicated from the data sources. The rocket science unit of instruction challenged all of the students, especially in terms of the difficult mathematics concepts. However, all of the other aspects of the unit were equally challenging, and the sharing of ideas and group problem-solving strategies were prevalent throughout the unit. Student motivation was higher than I had ever seen when we were in the midst of rocket science. In fact, one student became so motivated about rocket science that he won third place in the 1995 State Science Fair and an overall “Best of Show.” If anyone else can benefit from the model of middle school teaching that I developed, I would be ecstatic, but the model was truly for myself and the students that I teach. I certainly intend to keep improving the model in the years to come.

study and results with the other Title I teachers. She developed a brief keynote presentation, focusing on her methodology and results, to share with her colleagues. She also provided them with a brief one-page handout. Near the conclusion of her presentation, she gauged interest in the possibility of creating an action research community of reading teachers throughout the district. Interest exceeded what she had anticipated!

(Continued)

ACTION RESEARCH PORTRAIT 2
CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF MITOSIS AND MEIOSIS

Sharing the Results of Action Research

Recall that the purpose of this action research study is to improve students’ understanding of the processes of mitosis and meiosis.

Following the completion of their formal research report, Sarah and Tom asked their department chair, Paul, if they could have 15 to 20 minutes at the next department meeting to share their findings with the rest of the science teachers. He agreed, and their brief presentation was ultimately very well received by their fellow science teachers.

After the science department meeting, Paul suggested to Sarah and Tom that they ask their principal to provide them with some time at the next full faculty meeting to share their results with all teachers in their school. Sarah said, “I don’t really think that teachers in other subject areas are going to be interested in how I helped my students improve their understanding of mitosis.” Paul responded, “You might be right, Sarah. However, I think they’ll be really interested in hearing how you used the blogs to help you identify where your students were really struggling and how that technology enabled your students to actually help each other learn the material. That aspect of your study alone was very impressive.”

Sarah and Tom reworked their presentation in order to highlight the use and impact of the classroom blogs and presented it the following week at the full...
faculty meeting. After seeing how excited several of the teachers became about what they had shared, Sarah suggested that they form a school-based action research community in order to further study the use of blogs across curricular areas within a high school setting, and Tom offered to get it up and running.

Initially, four of their colleagues signed up to participate in the newly formed action research community in their school. Their first step in the next cycle was to discuss plans for investigating the continued use of blogs in their school and for each of the six teachers to begin to develop a research plan for how each would incorporate blogs into their instruction and how they would determine the impact on student learning.

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**Action Research Checklist 9**

**Sharing and Disseminating the Results of Action Research**

☐ Develop a plan for sharing and communicating the results of your action research.
  - Will you share the results at the local level?
  - Will you share them at a broader level?

☐ For a local presentation:
  - determine the length of time and setting or format for your presentation,
  - develop an outline of the major points of your presentation,
  - thoroughly develop your presentation using presentation software (e.g., PowerPoint, Keynote, Prezi), and
  - practice your presentation in advance, to ensure you stay within your allotted time limits.

☐ For a broader (i.e., conference) presentation:
  - select a conference at which you would be interested in presenting,
  - following their guidelines, develop and submit your proposal for presenting, and
  - wait for the decision of the conference organizers.

*(Continued)*
Once you hear that your proposal has been accepted for presentation(!),
develop an outline of the major points of your presentation,

- thoroughly develop your presentation using presentation software
  (e.g., PowerPoint, Keynote, Prezi), and
- practice your presentation in advance, to ensure you stay within your
  allotted time limits.

Be confident! Good luck!

REFLECTING ON THE ACTION RESEARCH PROCESS

At the risk of once again sounding repetitive, professional reflection is a key component of
the action research process and should be integrated thoroughly throughout each of the
steps along the way. The acts of sharing, disseminating, and communicating the results of
your action research provide yet another opportunity to reflect on the process itself.
Reviewing all that you have done and accomplished in conducting your study—which is
necessary when preparing to put pen to paper and draft your final research report or when
developing an outline for a presentation of your study—is another way that you can intro-
spectively examine your practice of teaching. It is essential to your professional growth and
development that you seize each and every opportunity—prior to, during, and following
your action research study—to engage in reflective practice.

Reflection is about learning from the critical examination of your own practice but
also about taking the time to critically reexamine exactly who was involved in the process,
what led you to want to examine this aspect of your practice, why you chose to do what
you did, where is the appropriate place (time, sequence, location, etc.) to implement future
changes, and how this has impacted your practice. Taking the time to thoroughly answer
these kinds of questions for yourself will aid in an even deeper, more meaningful examina-
tion of practice as well as a heightened level of empowerment (in my opinion).

Engaging in these types of truly professional activities (i.e., conducting action research,
disseminating your results, reflecting on the process) is something that you should truly
celebrate. Please don’t lose site of the fact that this is a BIG deal! You are empowering your-
self to take charge of a situation in your own professional setting. You’re not waiting for
things to “filter down” from educational research or from your state department of educa-
tion. YOU are taking the lead on finding ways to do YOUR work better and more effectively.
Take time, find ways, and collaborate to celebrate these professional successes.

My sincere advice to educational action researchers everywhere:

Share . . . disseminate . . . and celebrate!
This annotated list of related websites provides information about several online action research organizations and electronic journals. You will notice that several of the electronic mailing lists and electronic journals are sponsored by organizations also appearing below.

**Action Research Websites**

- **Action Research at Queen’s University** [http://resources.educ.queensu.ca/ar](http://resources.educ.queensu.ca/ar)

  This action research site is maintained by Queen’s University, located in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. Included on the university’s site are links to action research reports, several articles on reflective practice, and numerous action research reports from both undergraduate and graduate students at the university.


  This site is a wealth of resources! Sponsored by Southern Cross University in Lismore, New South Wales, Australia, it includes links to *Action Research International* (an online journal), a 14-week online course in action research and evaluation ([http://www.aral.com.au/areol/areolind.html](http://www.aral.com.au/areol/areolind.html)), various resource papers, five different electronic mailing lists, and abstracts from several action research theses and dissertations.


  Developed by Dr. Judith M. Newman of Mount Saint Vincent University, this site features articles by teachers who have conducted action research on a number of topics and an online conference on the Reflective Practitioner. There are also links to a number of related sites.

- **EmTech’s Action Research Page** [http://www.emtech.net/actionresearch.htm](http://www.emtech.net/actionresearch.htm)

  EmTech, or Emerging Technology Consulting, provides a lengthy webpage of links to useful sites related to action research.

- **Teacher Research** [http://gse.gmu.edu/research/tr](http://gse.gmu.edu/research/tr)

  Run jointly by Dr. Diane Painter from the Fairfax County (Virginia) Public Schools and Dr. Leo Rigsby from the Graduate School of Education, George Mason University, this site discusses a variety of issues in action research and also provides numerous links.
Action Research Electronic Journals

- *Educational Action Research* [http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/09650792.asp](http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/09650792.asp)

*EAR* is published by Routledge, a member of the Taylor and Francis Group. Similar to other journals, guidelines for prospective authors are provided. By clicking on the eJournal: Online Contents button, you can review sample issues of *EAR*, going back to its first edition in 1993 ([http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t716100708~db=all](http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t716100708~db=all)).


*Networks* is arguably the premier online journal for teacher action research, mainly because it is the first journal dedicated solely to teacher research. Sponsored by the University of Wisconsin–Madison, the journal provides a “place for sharing reports of action research, in which teachers at all levels, kindergarten to postgraduate, are reflecting on classroom practice through research ventures. It also provides space for discussion of other ways in which educational practitioners, alone or in collaboration, use inquiry as a tool to learn more about their work with the hope of eventually improving its effectiveness.” The editors of the journal strongly encourage teachers to share their classroom research with colleagues from around the world! By clicking on Current or Archives, readers can view and print the full text of all articles published in *Networks* since its inception in 1998.

- *Reflective Practice* [http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/14623943.asp](http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/14623943.asp)

This journal is published by the Taylor and Francis Group. *Reflective Practice* includes “papers that address the confections between reflection, knowledge generation, practice and policy.” Its focus is entirely on the nature and meaning given to the process of professional reflection.


This journal is sponsored by the College of Education and Human Development at the University of North Dakota. Its focus is on the “values of thoughtful observation as an educational method.” The articles, all of which are available on the site in full-text (HTML or PDF) format, center on naturalistic inquiry in educational settings.

- *The Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* [http://www.iupui.edu/~josotl](http://www.iupui.edu/~josotl)

*JoSoTL*, sponsored by Indiana University, encourages educators to share their knowledge and experiences about the teaching-learning process. The editors specifically state that “submissions that include reflective commentary about the result of the investigation will be considered of greater value to our readership and more appealing for publication.” All articles are available both for preview (in your web browser) and for download (in PDF format).
• *The Ontario Action Researcher* http://oar.nipissingu.ca/index.htm

OAR is sponsored by Nipissing University in North Bay, Ontario, Canada. It is made possible through a partnership of the Grand Erie District School Board, the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario, and Nipissing University. As a goal, OAR tries to mend “the rift between the researcher and the practitioner. Within this context, the journal strives to:

- Publish accounts of a range of action research projects in education and across the professions with the aim of making their outcomes widely available, providing models of effective action research and enabling educators to share their experiences
- Demonstrate connections between practice and theory through articles of a general nature on methodological and epistemological issues related to action research
- Disseminate reviews of books, websites and products related to action research
- And finally, to provide a forum for dialogue on the various action research projects that are taking place around the province.”

Similar to many of the other journals in this list, all articles in The Ontario Action Researcher are available online in full-text format, free of charge. Although the articles are still accessible, the journal has now transitioned to become the *Canadian Journal of Action Research* (http://cjar.nipissingu.ca/index.php/cjar).

### SUMMARY

- Sharing the results of action research studies conducted by practitioner-researchers can help reduce the gap that exists between research/theory and practical application in educational settings.
  - Sharing the results of research studies also provides an opportunity for practitioner-researchers to gain additional insight into their study and ultimate findings.
  - The act of sharing and celebrating the findings of action research can be a very rewarding professional experience and can empower educators to take the lead on educational improvements.
  - Results can be shared locally, with fellow teachers, students, and your district’s administration.
  - Keep any local presentation brief and focused, highlighting the following: background information, purpose of the study, methodology, results, conclusions, and action plan. Remember to always leave time at the end for questions and answers.
  - Action research communities can serve as outlets for sharing the results of action research, for lending encouragement and support to teachers, and for mentoring other teachers.
• Results can also be shared at professional conferences and in academic journals.
  o Most professional conferences and journals are refereed, meaning that they use a blind peer-review process to determine the merits of a proposal submitted for presentation or publication.
  o When writing for a journal, it is important to keep your audience in mind, use a clear and reader-friendly writing style, and strive to keep your readers’ attention.
• In increasing fashion, results of action research studies can be shared electronically via action research websites, electronic mailing lists, and electronic journals.
• The act of communicating the results of your action research provides yet another opportunity to reflect not only on the topic of your investigation but also on the action research process itself.

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Describe ways in which presenting or publishing your action research is beneficial in terms of professional reflective practice.
2. Develop a list of alternative techniques, not discussed in the chapter, for sharing the findings of your action research. These techniques may simply be adaptations of other forms of professional communications.
3. Conduct a web search for other types of outlets for sharing findings from action research studies, perhaps in a specific area of education (e.g., mathematics education, special education, early childhood education, gifted and talented education) that is important to you. Describe your search and what you found online.
4. Subscribe to one of the electronic mailing lists identified in this chapter. Monitor and/or contribute to the online discussions over the course of several days or weeks. What did you learn? Did you contribute to any of the discussions? If so, what was your reaction to that experience?
5. Visit one of the electronic journals listed in the chapter. Review and make a list of the steps involved in the process of getting an article published in that particular journal.

KEY TERMS

academic journals 266  electronic journals 270  professional learning communities 261
action research community 261  electronic mailing list 270  refereed 266

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