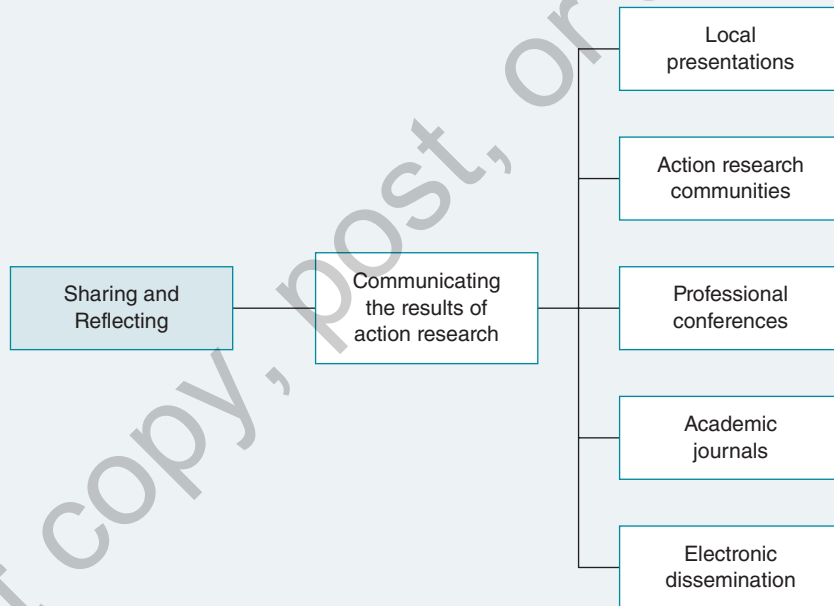


SHARING AND REFLECTING

Chapter 9 Organizer



special education services and asked if they might be allowed to share their study and their results at upcoming faculty meetings. The administrators agreed, adding that they were excited to hear the presentation themselves. Furthermore, they said that they would inquire with the superintendent about allowing the educators to share their work at an upcoming school board meeting. All five members of the team agreed that they might need to revise their infographic presentation in order to make it more appropriate for different audiences, but they were very excited about these upcoming opportunities.

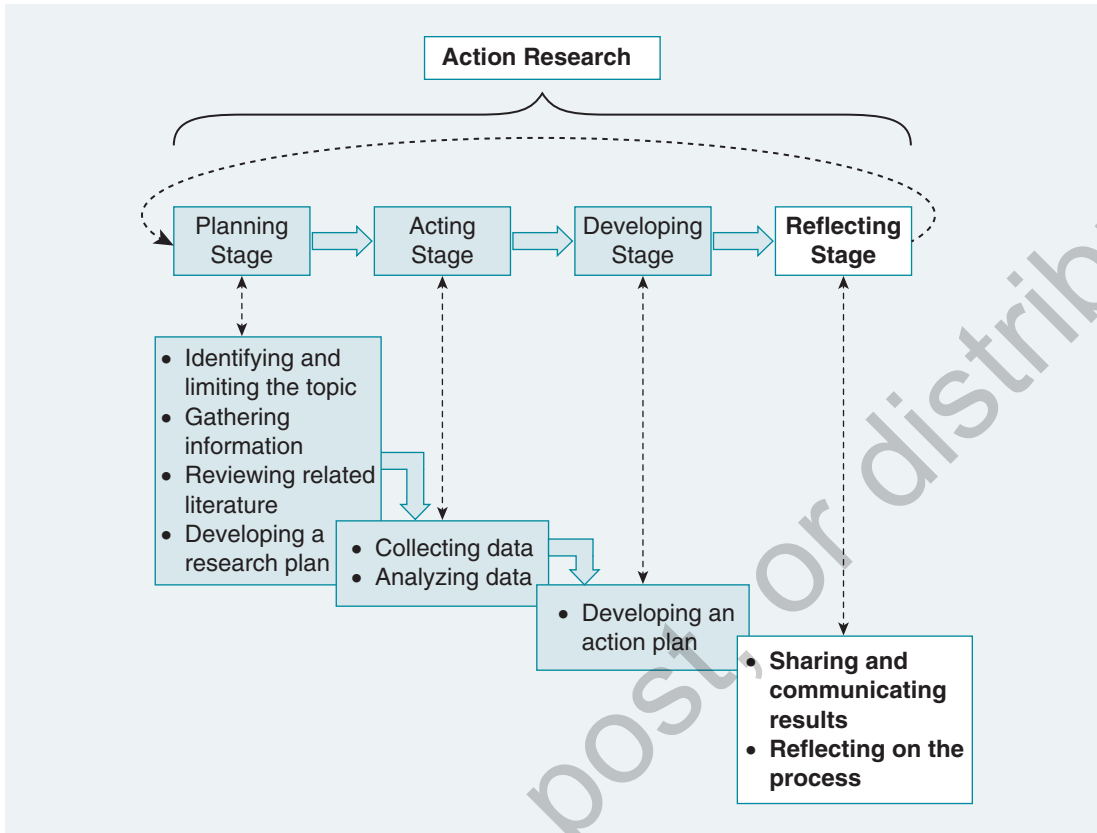
Questions to Think About:

- What types of things should the educators think about when preparing presentations for their different audiences?
- Would there be aspects of their study that they could or should share with some audiences but not with others?
- Are there any ways in which these upcoming presentations could influence their action plan for future steps?

In Chapter 1, we discussed the gap that exists in the field of education between research (typically done by university professors or others trained as researchers) and the needs of practicing classroom teachers. In an effort to reduce this gap between research/theory 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 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 theorizing researchers and 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 or one that is 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., knowledge about the instructional process, as well as familiarity with teachers' day-to-day schedules, the resources available to them, and their 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). In addition, given that you yourself believed, at the outset of your study, 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 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 you garner 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 will encourage others to engage in these types of activities in their own classrooms. I have 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 you present your research, Johnson (2008) advises that your 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.



Video Clip 9.1

View a clip of Dr. Mertler discussing the importance of sharing and reflecting on your research.

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:

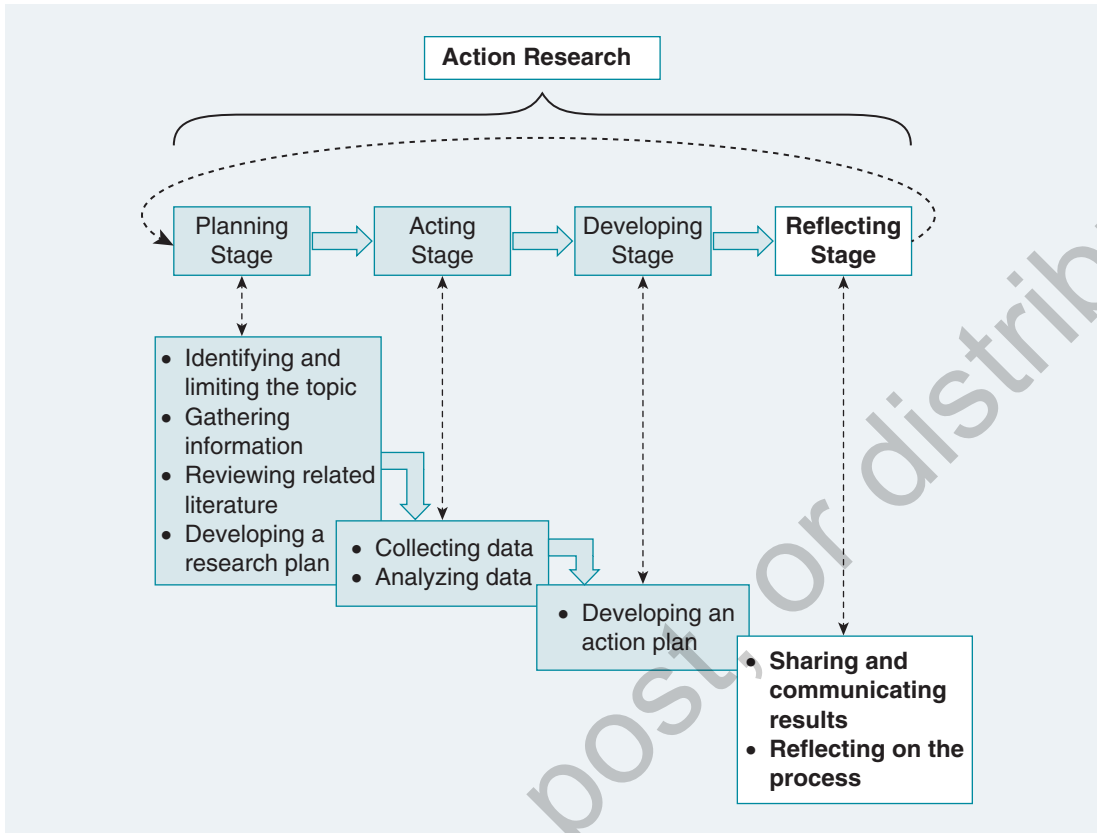
1. *Background information.* Briefly summarize the literature review you conducted, trying not to mention everything you read. Simply mention three or four key aspects of your review, focusing on anything that provided you guidance in your study.
2. *Purpose of your study.* Share with your audience why 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, should be what takes up the majority of the time you have been allotted for your presentation. Your results, along with your conclusions and action plan, are the aspects of your research 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.



Video Clips 9.2

& 9.3 View clips of practitioner-researchers discussing the importance of sharing and reflecting on their action research.

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



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teaching and learning are made without any consideration of research in these areas. Johnson (2008) believes that this can result in bad educational practice or perhaps even educational *malpractice*. The results of action research can be an effective means of enabling your school or district to make educational decisions that are based on actual data collected, as opposed to being based on hunches or simply on what “looks good” to the people 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 (Mertler, 2016, 2018). 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 say, a PLC should incorporate

- 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 their members view innovation and experimentation not as tasks or projects to be completed but rather as ways of conducting day-to-day business forever (DuFour et al., 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 (Mertler, 2018). 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 (Mertler, 2013, 2016). 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, 2010a).

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 (Mertler, 2013, 2016). Perhaps more importantly, 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 that particular area—of professional development. To me, this notion is truly the epitome of customized professional development.

Developing PLCs that formally integrate action research can have 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 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 (Mertler, 2013, 2016). 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, 2018). 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 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 can provide 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 usually held annually and are sponsored by a state, regional, or national organization. You can expect the organization to release a call for proposals anywhere from 4 to 10 months in advance of the conference. The call should describe everything you will need to include in your proposal, which will likely be a three- to four-page summary of your study. Once you have submitted your proposal, the organization will send it out to other professional educators for a “blind review,” meaning that the reviewers will not know who wrote it. They will 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 will receive notice a couple of months in advance of the conference, giving you adequate 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 your fellow professional educators can be a bit overwhelming and a little unnerving, especially for

the first-time presenter. It may help to know that you can often choose the format of your presentation. There are typically three formats for conference presentations:

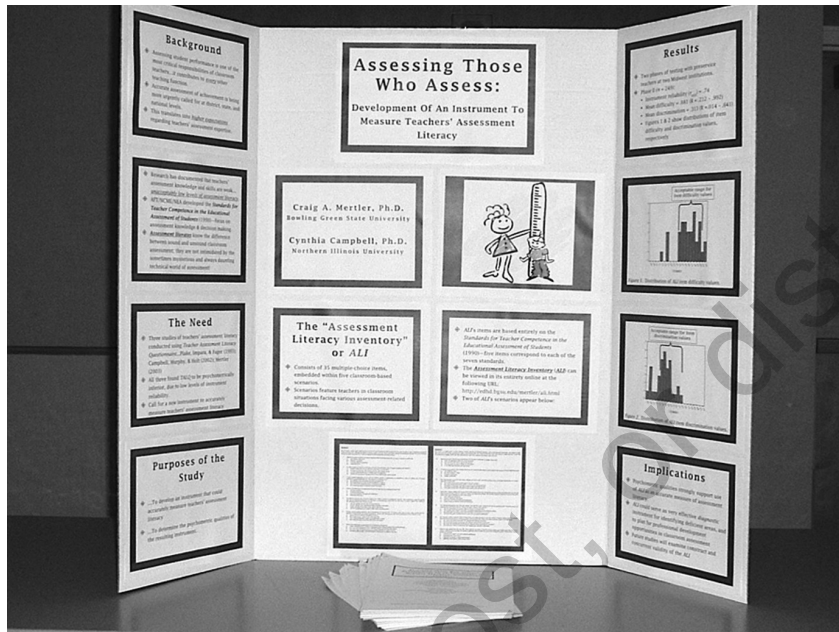
- Paper presentations
- Symposia or panel presentations
- Poster presentations

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 “chitchat” in Japanese) is a simple presentation format where you show 20 images, each for 20 seconds, so that your entire presentation lasts 6 minutes 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 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 are 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 trifold board. On the board, the researcher assembles summarizations of various aspects of the study (think of 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 the least stressful for presenters because of its less formal nature and its conversational style.

Figure 9.1 Sample Poster Presented at a Research Conference



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 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 the 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 detailing well-conducted studies. Almost every paper accepted for publication in an academic journal requires 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 will suggest that the author(s) “revise and resubmit” the paper. This may occur when the paper is poorly written or needs a complete reworking but when the topic may be of great interest to the journal’s readership.

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 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

Figure 9.2 Sample Letter From a Journal Editor; Manuscript Conditionally Accepted for Publication

Craig A. Mertler

Bowling Green State University

College of Education & Human Development

Division of Educational Foundations & Inquiry

School of Leadership and Policy Studies

Bowling Green, OH 43403

Re: "Secondary Teachers' Assessment Literacy: Does Classroom Experience Make a Difference?"

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

(Continued)

Figure 9.2 (Continued)

- 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”).

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James A. Rycik

Editor

JAR/gv

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your submission(s). Realize that the articles you are reading represent those that have been accepted for publication. Pay 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. Audiences may find academic writing both enjoyable and engaging, but it does take some effort on the part of the author.

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

- *Action Learning: Research and Practice*
- *Action Research*
- *Action Research International*
- *Canadian Journal of Action Research*
- *Education Research for Social Change*
- *Educational Action Research*
- *ie: Inquiry in Education*
- *Improving Schools*
- *International Journal of Action Research*
- *Journal of Action Research*
- *Networks: An Online Journal for Teacher Research*
- *Reflective Practice*
- *Systemic Practice and Action Research*
- *Teaching & Learning: The Journal of Natural Inquiry & Reflective Practice*
- *The Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*
- *The Journal of Teacher Action Research*
- *The Ontario Action Researcher*
- *Wisdom of Practice: An Online Journal of Action Research*

Any, and all, of these would be wonderful outlets for disseminating your action research studies.

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 you 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. For this reason, it is important that you 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 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.

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. A sampling of these sites includes the following:

- Action Research Resources (www.aral.com.au/resources/index.html)
- Educating as Inquiry: A Teacher/Action Research Site (www.lupinworks.com/ar/index.html)
- EmTech’s Action Research Page (www.emtech.net/actionresearch.htm)
- Teacher Research (gse.gmu.edu/research/tr)

Many school districts, also, have developed and host their own action research webpages. The specific purpose of these sites is to allow teachers to share the results of their action research with others in their district; however, because they can be accessed by anyone in the world, there is the potential for much wider dissemination.

As a concrete example of online means of sharing action research, let me highlight the efforts of one district: the Madison Metropolitan School District (in Wisconsin). The district’s action research website (<http://oldweb.madison.k12.wi.us/sod/car/carhomepage.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 teachers at Madison Metropolitan schools 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 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 earlier. 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 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 online journals, including *Action Research International*, *Educational Action Research*, *Networks: An Online Journal for Teacher Research*, and *The Ontario Action Researcher*. These journals make the submission process relatively painless, since the manuscripts are typically submitted via e-mail as attachments. Furthermore, the turnaround time from submission to (hopefully) publication—simply because of the technology involved—tends to be several months less than it is for print journals. Another benefit of these journals can be experienced by the practitioner-researcher as a *consumer* of action research: they 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 format and can therefore easily be downloaded 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 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 improve 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.

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 introspectively 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 not only 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 help you examine your practice even more deeply and more meaningfully, as well as increase your sense 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 sight of the fact that this *is* a BIG deal! You are empowering yourself 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 education. 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!

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.
 - 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.
 - 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 communication.

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. Visit one of the online 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 262

action research
community 257

electronic journals 266

electronic mailing
list 267

professional learning
communities 257
refereed 262



Review → Practice → Improve

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CONDUCTING ACTION RESEARCH

ACTION RESEARCH CASE STUDY 2

Improving Reading Comprehension in a Title I Program

Sharing the Results of Action Research

Recall that the purpose of this action research study was to improve students' reading comprehension skills within a Title I context.

Kathleen was very excited about the results of her action research study and about the process itself. She felt fairly sure that the other Title I teachers in her district would also find the results interesting and very meaningful. She approached the director of the district's Title I program and requested some time at their monthly meeting at

the district's offices. The director willingly agreed to provide Kathleen with some time to share her study and results with the other Title I teachers. Kathleen 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 their interest in the possibility of creating an action research community of reading teachers throughout the district. Interest exceeded what she had anticipated!

ACTION RESEARCH CASE STUDY 3

Conceptual Understanding of Mitosis and Meiosis

Sharing the Results of Action Research

Recall that the purpose of this action research study was 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 expressed a doubt, saying, "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 countered: "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 would be 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 his or her instruction and determine the impact on student learning.

WRITING UP ACTION RESEARCH: REFLECTING ON RESEARCH

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.

Important self-awareness gained through professional reflection

Plans for future actions, based on results of action research and reflection

(Continued)

(Continued)

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.

Critically important lessons learned

Source: Graham, 1995.

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.

Unintended outcomes of the study

Reflecting on results and overall experience helps inform future cycles of action research

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.

A true application of action research

Source: DuBois, 1995.

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 limit.
- For a broader (i.e., conference) presentation,
 - select a conference at which you would be interested in presenting;
 - following the sponsoring organization's guidelines, develop and submit your proposal for presenting, and
 - wait for the decision of the conference organizers.
- 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 limit.
- Be confident! Good luck!