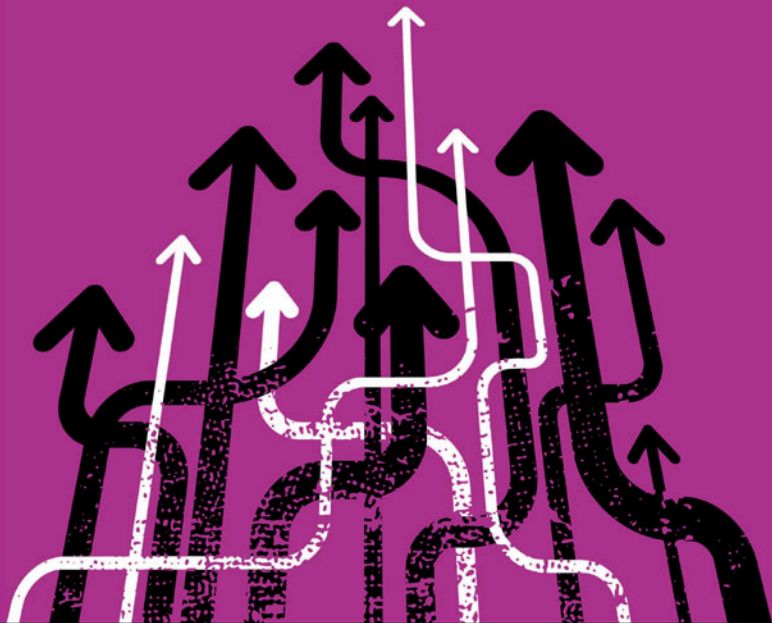


ACTION RESEARCH

A GUIDE FOR THE
TEACHER RESEARCHER

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We must also describe the situation we want to change or improve by focusing on who, what, when, where and how. For example, we might answer these questions:

- What evidence does Sarah have that girls are underachieving in Maths? Sarah analysed recent SATS papers.
- Which girls are being prevented from achieving more, in what aspects of mathematics? Sarah's analysis reveals it is higher-ability girls in the area of knowledge of numbers and the number system.
- How is mathematics presently taught? Stimulus materials in Mathematics are aimed at stereotypical boys' interests: football and dinosaurs.

Early reading

Reading of literature based upon evidence takes us away from **assertion** and either confirms what we have experienced or takes us beyond our experience. If reading confirms our experience, it allows us to move forward with increased confidence. If it takes us beyond our experience, new possibilities are opened up to us. Stating what we have read demands that we clarify what we understand, both of the literature and of our own position. It makes us ask questions of our own understanding and action. This can be uncomfortable for us, but also exciting.

Developing aims

If Sarah believes that girls' achievement in Maths is down to issues of societal expectancy, how can she counter assumptions about such achievement? Addressing tensions or dilemmas like these can lead to specific **aims** for Sarah's research focus.

Aims are used to break down our focus into one, two or three specific goals that appear, from our action plan, to be achievable. For example, Sarah's aims became:

- 1 To increase the number of girls attaining an L3 in Maths by the end of KS1.
- 2 To raise the percentage of pupils attaining an L3 in Maths at the end of KS1 and thereby the overall APS (average point score) for the cohort.
- 3 To share findings with other teachers within the key stage in order to narrow the gap between the attainment of more able boys and girls in Maths at the end of KS1.

Sarah does not simply want to improve the achievements of her own higher-ability girls but also to *share* her findings with her colleagues, to narrow the gap between girls and boys in the school, and to counter unexplored assumptions about girls' and boys' achievement.

In conducting her action research Sarah may not achieve all her aims. The clue is in the word *aims*: she is *aiming* to achieve but, as we have said before, life is interesting and with good research it can be surprising!

Key concepts 16

Critical incident	An interesting incident or experience that reveals the underlying values of a situation.
Reconnaissance	Taking time for self-reflection on your own beliefs and to understand the nature and context of your general idea, through simple data collection and early reading.
Assertion	An observation unsupported by your own data or research-based reading.
Aim	A specific, detailed description of the focus. There could be one aim, but more often the focus is broken down into two or three aims that appear achievable from our action plan.

Finding literature

More literature is becoming available free at the point of access. Much of it is online. Some of this is from government agencies and is available through free subscription to email lists or through search engines. We must be careful to check that the work we find in this way is sourced by a reputable academic organisation and is not vanity publishing. We should be able to click through to the publisher to check their credentials. If we are not writing up our action research project academically, we may be able to source all the reading material we need free of any subscription, although we may consider that there are benefits to subscribing to an organisation, such as a college or school department or faculty.

If you are enrolled on a course, you should be able to access the provider's library as part of your course fees. If you do subscribe individually, check out the tax status of such subscriptions. You may be able to offset them against tax.

There are different sorts of literature, and their 'status' or 'validity' is considered in the subsection 'What sort of literature?' under the main heading 'Developing understanding of the focus' later in this chapter.

Subject associations

A good place to start is with the publications of subject associations. Subject associations normally produce their own journal. Often these have well-researched articles, some based on pedagogy and some on subject matter. These cover a full range of subjects taught in schools, colleges and higher education institutions. A good place to start is the Council for Subject Association's website, www.subjectassociation.org.uk, where you will find a list of links to individual associations.

British Educational Research Association (BERA)

BERA (www.bera.ac.uk) is the leading association for educational research. It covers all sectors and has special interest groups (SIGs), such as 'Arts Based Educational Research', 'Early Childhood Education and Care', 'Practitioner Research' (of particular interest to

The screenshot shows the BERA website with the following content:

- BERA Special Interest Groups (SIGs)**
 - Arts Based Educational Research
 - Comparative and International Education
 - Creativity in Education
 - Curriculum, Assessment and Pedagogy
 - Early Childhood Education and Care
 - Educational Effectiveness and Improvement
 - Educational Research and Educational Policy-making
 - Higher Education
 - Inclusive Education
 - Leadership and Management in Education
 - Literacy and Language
 - Mathematics in Education
 - Mentoring and Coaching
 - Neuroscience and Education
 - New Technologies in Education
 - Philosophy of Education
 - Physical Education and Sports Pedagogy
 - Post-compulsory and Lifelong Learning
- BERA Special Interest Groups (SIGs)**

SIGs are an important part of BERA membership and key to the BERA community. They represent the particular research concerns of groups of members, encompassing both different disciplinary approaches to educational research and different educational concerns.

The SIGs provide ways of bringing together groups of individuals within education who share the same interests or approaches to research.

SIG activities take place across the UK. Involvement with these SIGs can be through attending SIG meetings and/or through participating with the SIG online communities.

Information for SIG convenors

BERA Logo and guidelines

You may wish to create materials e.g. fliers, powerpoint presentations, handouts, for your SIG events. In order to give continuity in terms of BERA's visual identity, you are encouraged to use the BERA guidelines. These are available for download if you click here (you need to be logged in). Please note that the BERA logo should only be used for BERA events; it should not be used by BERA members to badge other events without permission.

Finance forms

To access the forms to gain approval for your SIG's financial
- Members**
 - Log in
 - Join BERA
- BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research 2011 (PDF) 121.52 KB**
- BERA Awards**

action researchers), 'Sexualities', 'Teacher Education' and many more. Much of their material is only accessible through subscription, but if we want the latest thinking this is the place to start, particularly with access to back copies of the *British Educational Research Journal*.

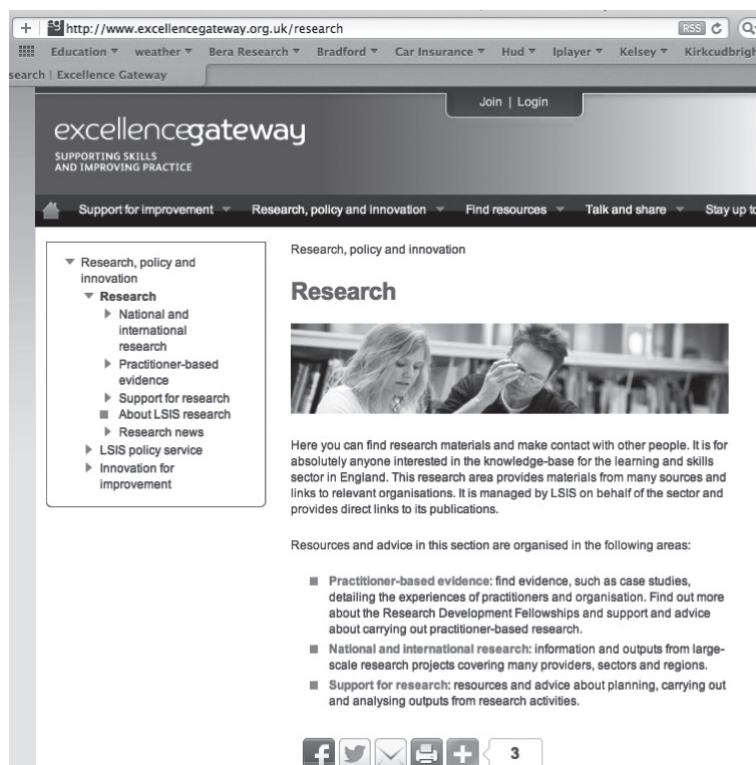
On the home page there is a link to the British Curriculum Foundation (one of its founders was Lawrence Stenhouse) which publishes *The Curriculum Journal*, aimed at primary, secondary and FE curricula. There is also a link to 'Peer and Partner Associations' where you will find a list of other UK educational research associations, as well as world, European and American associations.

Other electronic sources

We need to be aware that organisations can change their names and home pages, and even cease operating – sometimes making their resources available to other hosts. The list below is indicative of sources that can be found.

Government departments and agencies

The Learning Skills and Improvement Service has a practitioner research link: www.excellencegateway.org.uk/research.



The Department for Education (DfE) is a good source of statistical information: www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/index.shtml.

The DfE also has a research bulletin published on this website: www.education.gov.uk/schools/careers/traininganddevelopment/research-informedpractice/b0058454/schoolresearch12/schoolresearch11.

The situation on the web and with government agencies is dynamic but always worth searching. The home pages may change with governments, and the emphasis may change with policy, but research materials can often be hunted down.

Professional associations

Membership of a professional association, such as the NUT, NAS, ATL or UCU, has the advantage of access to their journals – often online – and websites for reputable research.

Other online research that is free at the point of access

A number of online research journals are developing that provide free access to research. The major search engines offer older scholarly articles that have been released by journals, and other providers offer more current articles through journals that ask contributors to pay for publication online, making them free to the reader. Some of these journals do peer-review the articles before they are published. This approach to publication may well develop further in the future.

Respected researchers, including those who work as action research collaborators, and academics are increasingly making their work available on YouTube, Facebook, TED and similar platforms. These can be used, but we still need to be vigilant with regard to validity and bias. If we find something exciting on the web, we need to do a little research into the background of the individual and the organisation (if any) and ask:

- Do we know how they arrived at their findings?
- Has their work been peer-reviewed?
- Do they have contact details?
- Do they work for an organisation that is accountable? If so, who are they accountable to? Does anybody fund them? Who are they?
- Does the presenter have a track record of reputable work?

Visiting a library – in person

This is similar to the kind of activity we might undertake at a public library when looking for a new fiction book to read. The Dewey classification is used, which groups books of a similar category together under a classification number, making it more likely that if we browse the shelf around our selection we will find other books or journals that relate to our topic. We may also find leads to related materials, not necessarily uncovered in our electronic search, by looking at any given book's reference list.

Visiting a library – electronically

This is becoming more popular, as it prevents unnecessary visits in person. Higher education libraries, in particular, are becoming more sophisticated online, offering the ability to search the full library and, more importantly, libraries across the country and the world. Resources are not only text-based but also visual. Library catalogues are constantly being refined and developed to include searches of a range of educational databases and electronic books. We may never have to leave our desk to find research on topics similar to our own, from all over the world.