ITAC INNOVATOR PROJECT 2023

ACTION RESEARCH HANDBOOK FOR TEACHING ARTISTS

SPONSORED BY
the Academy for Impact through Music

GUIDE

PROLOGUE:

Preparing Our Minds for Action Research (AR)

INT or EXT. as decided by the reader.

Narrator:

Think of a time when you got better at something over time because you were so interested in doing it. It could be inside your art form or outside the arts altogether. Maybe learning to ride a bike or cooking.

Can you think of one specific thing you learned along the way?

Reader speaks to themselves:

Maybe when I was making bread, how I wanted to get the crust the way I like it.

Or when I was drawing and how I wanted to capture moonlight on ocean water...

Narrator:

Got one? Remembering how the process went, can you imagine the learning process as a series of experiments?
Things you tried and why you tried them.
What did you learn by trying?

Silence...

THE FIRST GALLERY: ACTION RESEARCH (AR) THEORY AND CONTENT

Tableau I - Action Research Already Lives in You

Action research is a natural part of *teaching*.

All good teachers ***observe students*** carefully, ***try new things*** in their teaching, ***study*** the ***documents their students produce***, and ***adjust*** their teaching ***to get better results***. The fancy term **"action research"** simply adds a modest container for those good teaching instincts; it **helps us get better faster by focusing, clarifying, and giving communicative power.**

The term ***"action research"*** sounds intimidating to some teaching artists, and boring to others, because of its academic origins and its rare usage in the arts. But in fact, action research ***is a common form of investigation, mostly used in education settings, to address and improve teaching practices***. It was founded in the 1940s in the U.S. and is now used in both formal academic practice and less formal professional development around the world. Teaching artists are naturally curious and experimental—maybe ***"action research"*** would seem less scary or irrelevant if we called it "THE IMPROVEMENT GAME".

If you do an internet search of the words **"action research",** you will see it is alive and well. Snoop around a little, and you will find a ***scholarly through line*** in universities *as well as a range of applications of* varying **models** and **formality**. There is a little tension between the two perspectives—some scholars are uncomfortable with less rigorous applications, fearful that it dilutes or demeans their expertise, and non-university practitioners bristle when they are condescended to or dismissed by specialists from academia.

In reality, it's a continuum, and ***this handbook lives on the less-formal, user-friendly side.***

THE FIRST GALLERY: ACTION RESEARCH (AR) THEORY AND CONTENT

Tableau I - Action Research Already Lives in You

The great 20th-century physicist David Bohm proposed this: "Any time you see seeming opposites, look for the greater truth that contains them both". ***The greater truth that contains both poles of action research—both the research-professional rigor and the practitioner-friendly adaptations—is that action research is an effective, proven way to improve teaching and learning.*** The greater truth of any AR in education work has these features, whether in formal or less formal practice:

- ***Educators become practitioner-researchers*** *(rather than relying on an objective observer-researcher).*
- ***Discoveries can impact the teaching along the way*** *(rather than waiting for formal final reports).*
- *A particular problem or* ***area of interest gets focused*** *on.*
- ***Documentation, observation, and reflective analysis rise in priority****.*

Dedicated educators who experiment to improve their students' learning are almost doing action research without knowing that they are. Teaching artists can adopt the practices we propose in this handbook without significantly changing what they already do. These practices are consistent with *Paulo Freire's Participatory Action Research.*

Let's name one instinctive resistance many teaching artists have about action research, probably based on experiences around the word "research". It sounds analytical, driven by a deductive logic that kills the magic of our work. We invite you to suspend that prejudice—***action research is not a creativity killer. It's a creativity enhancer,*** an experimentation focuser—an enabling constraint, like the endless parade of enabling constraints that help artists find deeper and more original work.

THE FIRST GALLERY: ACTION RESEARCH (AR) THEORY AND CONTENT

Tableau II - But why?

It's fair to ask why.

Why should any teaching artist—who is probably already overstretched and underpaid, and who already finds ways to keep improving—go the extra step to adopt an action research framework?

It comes down to this: ***if you are committed to continual improvement as a teaching artist, action research is a user-friendly practice that will help you.*** These are benefits that teaching artists who take on action research practices report.

Strengthen your ongoing improvement.

Amid the busy swirl of teaching in the real world, with a hundred things to attend to, AR helps focus on specific issues and challenges you care about and find ways to overcome them. AR helps you be effective and creative in your own teaching practice, and that feels great.

Invigorate your teaching.

Teaching artists have dedicated a lot more time to training and developing their artistry in their art form than to their teaching artistry. They know how to identify challenges, apply their creativity, and push relentlessly toward excellence—in other words, be an artist! —in their artistic discipline than in their teaching artist work.

AR is a gentle discipline that encourages learning in teaching artistry as an art form. It clarifies, sets up interesting questions and challenges, requires you to make it your own creative medium, and gives you feedback on quality so you can guide your own improvement.

THE FIRST GALLERY: ACTION RESEARCH (AR) THEORY AND CONTENT

Tableau II - But why?

It benefits your students.

1) When you actively experiment, you observe, communicate, and think about what's going on more intentionally. Even experiments that don't work very well benefit your students because of the extra investment you bring.

2) Also, in an AR experiment, you model the kind of curious and motivated learning you want your students to develop. We even recommend that you let your students know you are experimenting; you can draw them into the challenge you are addressing—no need to be secret about it.

It empowers you with colleagues and stakeholders.

It's infectious. ***A teaching artist who can clearly describe the way they address challenges***, who can articulately identify evidence of impact in student work, who radiates interest and result-oriented experimentation, ***stands out as a leader.***

Let's face it—when teaching artists communicate their work, they are always eager and earnest, but rarely concise and effective in discussing actual practice.

AR sets you up to have great conversations about your work - conversations that are practical, inspirational, and productive.

THE FIRST GALLERY: ACTION RESEARCH (AR) THEORY AND CONTENT

Tableau III - What About Programs for Arts Learning?

Here are some benefits of using action research as a tool in programs for arts learning:

Professionalization. An active AR practice not only makes a teaching artist shine personally, but it professionalizes the programs you work with and the whole field.

Many people we have contact with (families, school partners, community members, funders) don't really understand what we know and can do. At worst, it seems muddy to them, at best magical. They love charisma and the flash, but they don't know the muscles. Regular practice of action research opens up what we know, in order to clearly describe how we can get better.

Organizational Action Research. AR is not just for teaching artists. Programs can adopt AR practices to study and improve the way they work, just by using the same steps in the same way.

If a program has a challenge with teacher retention or insufficient volunteerism or end-of-day clean-up, staff can design and launch an action research experiment to address it. Not only does it set a positive tone for the organization, but it's also likely that just by everyone being aware that they are part of an experiment, the challenge will move towards improvement (Hawthorne effect).

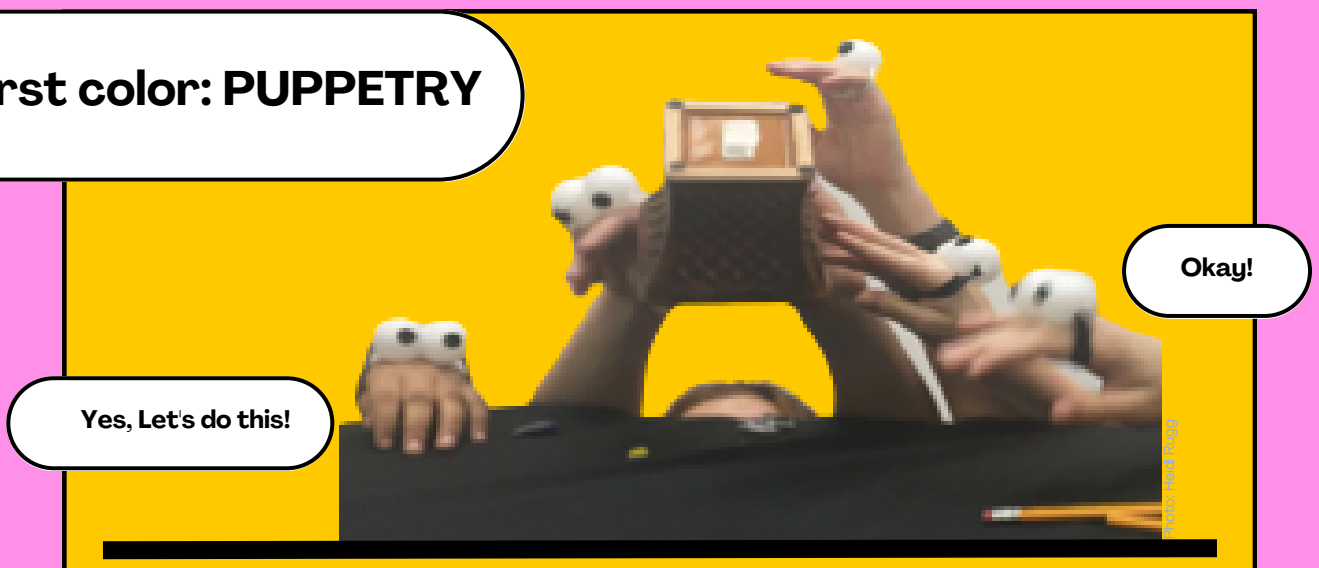
Funding. Beyond the circle of beloved funders who believe in a program, other potential funders have doubts. We think those people require unassailable research to demonstrate efficacy. We may never have research that does that.

But when we speak the distilled, curiosity-driven, and results-focused language of action research, we spark a new conversation that funders understand. Teaching artists and program leaders can use AR, to craft their own authentic observations and language to describe the work in ways that will engage funders.

THE SECOND GALLERY: ACTION RESEARCH (AR) IN PRACTICE

Tableau IV - Color Sample of Action Research in Different Art Learning Fields

First color: PUPPETRY



Heidi Rugg

I was working with a classroom teacher whose **4-year-old students were struggling with impulse control,** especially in terms of using their hands kindly.

I had the thought that my "**Instant Puppets**" **could help the children be more thoughtful with their physical interactions**, especially if I scaffolded the introduction a bit more deliberately.

I introduced the "Instant Puppets" to the children just **starting with the eyes on the hand, so the children would see their hands throughout the exercise.**

We later ***added the fuzzy body parts and continued to remind the children that their hands were inside the puppets*** and that ***their choices were controlling the puppet***. **The children were able to demonstrate impulse control** with the puppets during Circle Time.

I wonder if this will also translate to outside the classroom with more dedicated time and practice. I feel that, with more time, the scaffolding for this action could be tweaked to be more effective.

Photo: Kim Lee Photography

THE SECOND GALLERY: ACTION RESEARCH (AR) IN PRACTICE

Tableau IV - Color Sample of Action Research in Different Art Learning Fields

First color: PUPPETRY

PROBLEM: 4-years-old Students struggling with impulse control.

HUNCH: By using “instant puppets”, the students will become more thoughtful of their physical interactions.

EXPERIMENTS: Introducing “instant puppets” by scaffolding; adding parts of the puppets progressively to remind students their hands are always in control of the puppets.

DATA COLLECTION: Observations.

CONCLUSION: The students were able to demonstrate impulse control during circle time.

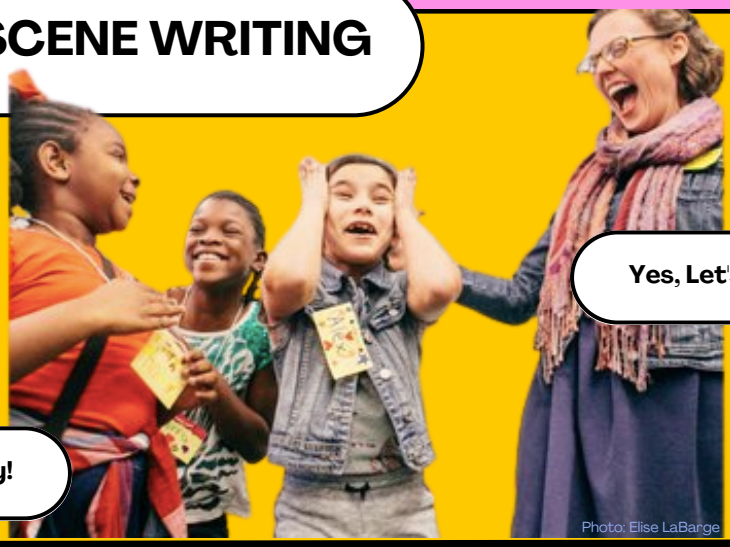
BOUNCE: I wonder if this will also translate to outside the classroom with more dedicated time and practice.

Photo: Heidi Rugg

THE SECOND GALLERY: ACTION RESEARCH (AR) IN PRACTICE

Tableau IV - Color Sample of Action Research in Different Art Learning Fields

Second color: SCENE WRITING



Elise LaBarge

I realized that **my 3rd-grade students have difficulties getting started and managing their time** when asked to write dialogues in script format for a scene.

I had the **hunch** that **if I gave them specific parameters** and **clear guidelines,** they would improve their performance.

I designed a **new worksheet with questions** and specific spaces for writing that I believed would **give them more structure** and **help their creative process**.

Most **students were able to complete their work, and new challenges arose**. Some groups needed additional support. After seeing this successful practice,

I wondered ***what would happen if we spent more time modeling the worksheets to make them even more specific.*** What if I populate the scene description and assign groups ahead of time?

THE SECOND GALLERY: ACTION RESEARCH (AR) IN PRACTICE

Color perception through other lenses...

Second color: SCENE WRITING

PROBLEM: Students present difficulties with starting to write and time management.

HUNCH: If I give them specific parameters and clear guidelines, they would improve their performance.

EXPERIMENTS: Designing and giving my students a new worksheet with questions and specific spaces for writing.

DATA COLLECTION: Observations.

CONCLUSION: Students were able to complete their work but new challenges arose. Some groups needed additional support.

BOUNCE: What would happen if I spent more time on the design of the worksheets? What if I populate the scene description and assign groups ahead of time?

Photo: Elise LaBarge

THE SECOND GALLERY: ACTION RESEARCH (AR) IN PRACTICE

Tableau IV - Color Sample of Action Research in Different Art Learning Fields

Third color: Hue: Music learning.

Tint: Motivation

Andre Camacho

I realized **my students were lacking the motivation to come to the lessons,** and **when given spaces to talk or express themselves they were** almost **not responsive.**

I had the **hunch** that by **conducting special activities containing ludic and personal interest elements**, they will **feel** more **ownership**.

I **designed experiments as games** where they would **discover their common interests and sense of identity** and applied them for 12 sessions.

Evidence showed that **students got to know each other better.** At the end of the 12-session period, **they were even bringing dynamics of their own to the lesson.**

As the **group developed a *better* sense of community**, I realized that we went a bit off musical topics. So, **I wondered what would happen if I could connect such social dynamics with music learning elements.**

THE SECOND GALLERY: ACTION RESEARCH (AR) IN PRACTICE

Color perception through other lenses...

Third color: Hue: Music learning. Tint: Motivation

PROBLEM:
My students lack motivation to come to the lessons, and when giving spaces for expression they are not responsive.

HUNCH:
If I conduct special activities containing ludic and personal relevance elements, their ownership will increase, and thus their motivation.

EXPERIMENTS:
Designing games where they would discover their common interests and develop their sense of identity, and apply them for 12 sessions.

DATA COLLECTION:
Lesson plans, written observations and videos.

CONCLUSION:
Students got to know each other better, developing their sense of community. They started bringing their own games and dynamics to share with the group.

BOUNCE:
As we were a bit off musical topics, I wondered what would happen if I connect such social dynamics to music learning elements.

THE SECOND GALLERY: ACTION RESEARCH (AR) IN PRACTICE

Tableau IV - Color Sample of Action Research in Different Art Learning Fields

Fourth color: Drama

Photo: StageWrite

Elana Lagerquist

During one of our drama residencies, one classroom had **many disengaged students.** The **students seemed to struggle when we moved to our arts circle space, as they were coming from a more traditional classroom setup** and didn't know how to handle a new classroom configuration.

We had the **idea of experimenting with a variety of different physical configurations such as working in pairs, in small groups, in individual spaces, as well as within a whole group circle**, thus providing a variety of spatial configurations and ways to interact with each other.

During 10 sessions of one hour each, **teaching artists designed different activities in a variety of group configurations** within each session, being careful to facilitate the transitions with simple clear directions for moving in the space and modeling how to interact with peers in different sized groups and spaces.

Observation led to noticing that **students were more participative** and interested in the content of the lessons. As part of the sessions, we also **conducted reflective activities to** additionally **note their learning and internalizing the objectives of the session with many more opportunities to work with their classmates in different modalities**.

These **observations led us to incorporate a variety of different classroom configurations throughout our lesson plans for different activities, which promoted more engagement.**

THE SECOND GALLERY: ACTION RESEARCH (AR) IN PRACTICE

Color perception through other lenses...

Fourth color: Drama

PROBLEM:

Students present disengagement. Some are also lacking ability to self-regulate and others are off task when put into a new classroom configuration.

HUNCH:

If we use different group configurations (pairs, smalls groups, individual work) and set them of clearly in our sessions, this will help our students' abilities to adapt and will give dynamism to our lessons.

EXPERIMENTS:

Designing and implementing activities with different group configurations, providing clear instructions for transitions into different modes of interaction.

DATA COLLECTION:

Observations. Group reflections.

CONCLUSION:

Students were able to be more participative and interested in the content of the lessons. They understood and internalized the learning and shared more with their peers in different ways.

BOUNCE:

A variety of classroom configurations for different activities have become part of our regular practice.

Photo: StageWrite

THE SECOND GALLERY: ACTION RESEARCH (AR) IN PRACTICE

Tableau IV - Color Sample of Action Research in Different Art Learning Fields

Fifth color: Arts Administrators

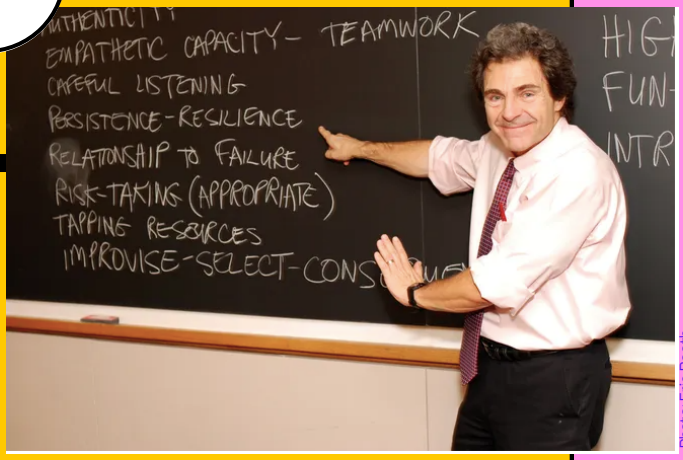


Photo: Eric Booth

Eric Booth

The **administrators** of this arts education organization **were going crazy from too many meetings that were too long and talky**. The problem was that they were being meeting-ed to death.

I had a **hunch** that **if we adjusted the expectations and attention to the** work of the **meeting**, we could get **shorter, more interesting meetings**, and maybe even fewer.

My **experiment** was that **the first three minutes of every meeting were silent preparation for the main information you wanted to share or learn** in the meeting, and **then a quick go-around for the most important topic for you** in the meeting.

They did **a quick check-out from each person at the end of the meeting to report on how they felt about their key issue and what felt incomplete** to them. They did this for two months, for every standing meeting.

The **meetings did get shorter, by** an average of **about ten minutes**. And the **attitudes about meetings became** somewhat **more positive,** in a quick survey we did over time. There were now **fewer meetings**.

This **bounced into a bolder experiment** in meetings to ***make them more engaging.***

THE SECOND GALLERY: ACTION RESEARCH (AR) IN PRACTICE

Color perception through other lenses...

Fifth color: Arts Administrators

PROBLEM: Meetings were too long and talky. Arts administrators were “meeting-ed to death”.

HUNCH: If we adjusted the expectations and attention to the work of the meeting, we could get shorter, more interesting meetings, and maybe even fewer.

EXPERIMENTS: The first three minutes of every meeting were silent preparation for the main information you wanted to share or learn in the meeting, and then a quick go-around for the most important topic for you in the meeting.

DATA COLLECTION: Observations, check-out activity at the end of each meeting.

CONCLUSION: **The meetings did get shorter, by an average of about ten minutes. And the attitudes about meetings became somewhat more positive, in a quick survey we did over time. There were now fewer meetings.**

BOUNCE: **Now that they are in the research mode, I will conduct bolder experiments in meetings to make them more engaging.**

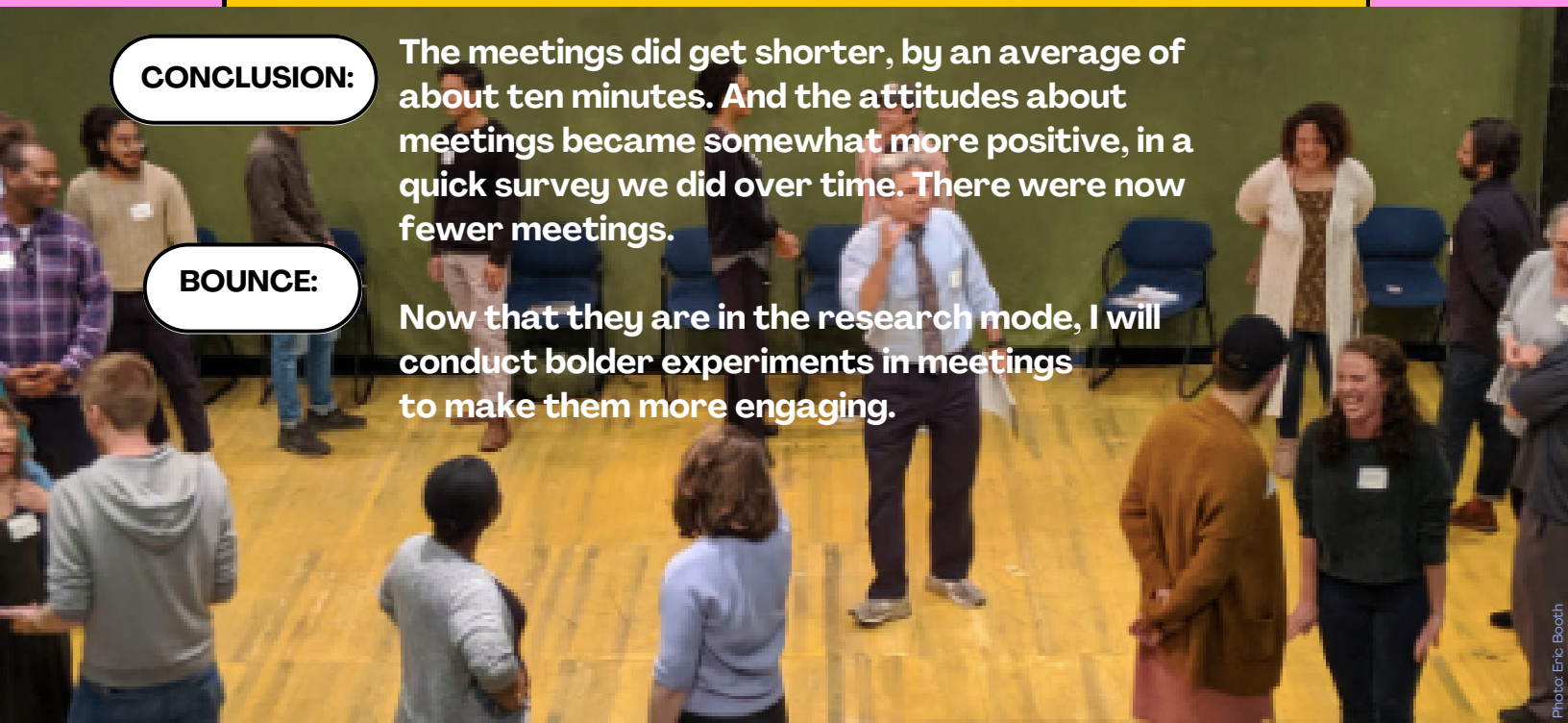


Photo: Eric Booth

THE SECOND GALLERY: ACTION RESEARCH (AR) IN PRACTICE

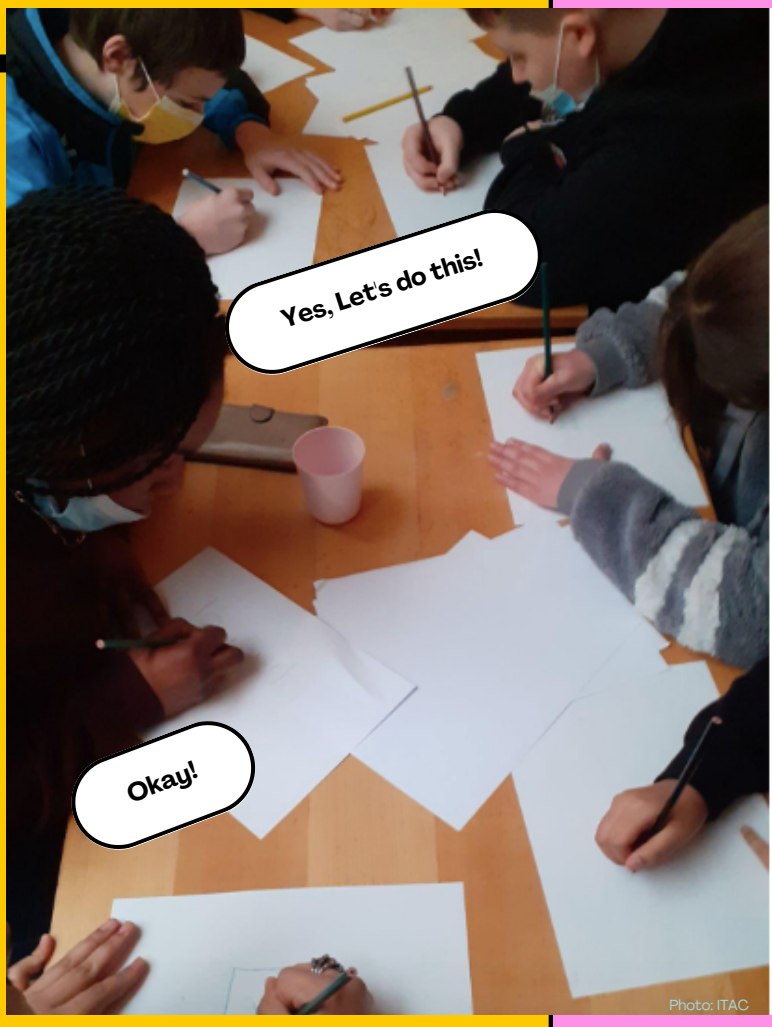
Tableau IV - Color Sample of Action Research in Different Art Learning Fields

Sixth color: Comprehensive Writing

Kristen Hester

I realized that students from **6th Grade in my ELA Classroom** were **getting very low scores on state tests for all subjects**. During the first few writing prompts, ***many students struggled with the concept of there not being a 'right' answer.*** I also noticed that **students just didn't know how to even begin to write when** they were **given complete freedom of expression**. It was as if this opportunity to say what was on their mind was a completely new idea.

So, I **decided to implement free writing** occasionally, providing students with regular writing practice that was **separate from formal writing that would be graded or assessed.** I set them up for success by **carefully planning open-ended prompts and specific guidelines on how to start writing.** By collecting their writings, and observing their behavior in class, I could notice **their motivation started rising,** and **they were able to focus more and** more, **getting better grades.**



THE SECOND GALLERY: ACTION RESEARCH (AR) IN PRACTICE

Color perception through other lenses...

Sixth color: Comprehensive Writing

PROBLEM:

Students were getting low scores on state tests for all subjects. They struggled with the concept of there not being a “right answer”. Students had difficulties to write when given complete freedom of expression.

HUNCH:

Hunch: If I implement occasional free writing, separate from formal writing, I will help get better on their perception of writing.

EXPERIMENTS:

Free writing time without grading or assessing their writings. Carefully planning and providing them with open-ended prompts and specific guidelines on how to start writing.

DATA COLLECTION:

Observations, writings produced by the students.

CONCLUSION:

Their motivation started rising, and they were able to focus more and more. They got better at their tests, obtaining better grades.

THE SECOND GALLERY: ACTION RESEARCH (AR) IN PRACTICE

Tableau IV - Color Sample of Action Research in Different Art Learning Fields

Seventh color: Dance

Photo: Arts Pop AU

Teaching artist collective

A group of pubescent **students are cautious/tentative about physical contact during dance movements.** We sense the reason is a normal hesitancy of adolescence, complicated by experiences during the pandemic. Also, they are communicating more virtually with fewer opportunities to practice physical interactions.

Yes, Let's do this!

We had a **hunch** that **if we included safe-easy-fun activities to develop physicality in every session, the growing familiarity of physical contact,** with the **positive feel of fun and safety**, then **touch would get easier** after six lessons.

We sprinkled a little physical contact and scaffolded, for example, in **developing a movement phrase**, we would have them try to do theirs while **keeping their fingertips connected with a partner** and build up to figuring out away they can do their phrases together touching in different ways three times.

We also took every opportunity we found within our usual practice to include physical contact. We also **held discussions about physicality** in general as reflections, and surprisingly, the discussions **were shifting toward identifying the benefits of contact.**

Okay!

I took class pictures at the beginning and end, giving no instruction, and there was way more physical contact in the final photo.

After four classes, three students initiated a whole group hug at the end of class—spontaneously, **and they kept it as a closing ritual.**

THE SECOND GALLERY: ACTION RESEARCH (AR) IN PRACTICE

Color perception through other lenses...

Seventh color: Dance

PROBLEM:

Due to different circumstances, a group of students has issues dealing with physical contact within the group during dance movements.

HUNCH:

If we included safe-easy-fun activities to develop physicality in every session, the growing familiarity of physical contact, with the positive feel of fun and safety, then touch would get easier after six lessons.

EXPERIMENTS:

Scaffolding from little physical contact to more and more physical contact in every session. Using every opportunity to implement an activity or movement that would require physical contact between the students.

DATA COLLECTION:

Observations, photographs, reflections.

CONCLUSION:

Conclusion: After four classes, three students initiated a whole group hug at the end of class, and it was kept as a closing ritual: physical contact was not an issue anymore.

THE SECOND GALLERY: ACTION RESEARCH (AR) IN PRACTICE

Tableau IV - Color Sample of Action Research in Different Art Learning Fields

Eighth color: Hue: Music learning. Tone: Practicing

Photo: AIM

Giannis Ismirnioglou

I noticed my **students were not practicing** their instruments **at home.**

I had the **hunch** that **creating a "practice plan"** to share with them **would facilitate the process** of organizing their practice time **and encourage them to practice more.**

I designed the practice plan and conducted several sessions where the **students would discuss and discover the different uses of the practice plan.**

Evidence (the practice plans and students' testimonies) showed that ***students that were not practicing in the beginning suddenly started practicing more and more progressively.***

On the other hand, **students** who were ***practicing regularly before had trouble,*** in the beginning, ***figuring out how to use the plans***, which resulted in a setback in their steady progress.

I ***wondered*** ***if finding out a friendly way for students' self-assessment would be of use to this process before setting up a practice plan...***

THE SECOND GALLERY: ACTION RESEARCH (AR) IN PRACTICE

Color perception through other lenses...

Eighth color: Hue: Music learning. Tone: Practicing

PROBLEM:

My students were not practicing their instruments at home.

HUNCH:

If I create and provide them with a “practice plan”, I will help them organize their practice and encourage them to practice more.

EXPERIMENTS:

I designed the practice plan and went through it with my students, clarifying its use and providing them with examples.

DATA COLLECTION:

Students testimonies (videos), practice plans.

CONCLUSION:

Students who were not practicing in the beginning suddenly started practicing more and more progressively. On the other hand, students who were practicing regularly before had trouble, in the beginning, figuring out how to use the plans, which resulted in a setback in their steady progress.

BOUNCE:

I wondered if finding out a friendly way for students’ self-assessment would be of use to this process before setting up a practice plan.

THE SECOND GALLERY: ACTION RESEARCH (AR) IN PRACTICE

Tableau IV - Color Sample of Action Research in Different Art Learning Fields

Ninth color: Visual Arts

INT. Students (11-13 years old) in a music program were required to take eight weeks of visual arts workshops to expand their creativity and get a wider view of themselves as artists.

Teaching artist collective

We realized that **most students believed they "couldn't draw"** and had a negative sense of themselves in the visual arts. Our **hunch** was that *by regularly using a drawing game format like Pictionary* for the first ten minutes of every lesson, ***in which they playfully succeeded through drawing***, would l***oosen up the negative view.***

Every week, **for 8 weeks** in total, **we took 10 minutes to play Quick Draw**, a game we invented that required them to draw, prompting guesses from peers. The ***prompts connected to the student's lives and experiences, and to music too (to build relevance);*** the challenges became increasingly difficult and abstract.

As the sessions went by, the **students increasingly wanted to keep playing** when time ran out, ***we were able to keep a portfolio of the images created,*** and we ***added some reflection activities*** to their emerging portfolio.

We had a **questionnaire at the beginning and end, which showed a significant change in self-assessment of their "artist" abilities** (in 80% of respondents), and a significant increase in their ability to identify specific skills within visual arts and their recognition that they possessed some skill.

We realized the potential of this activity, being able to develop it in different directions, and incorporating it as part of our class routine, and teaching practice.

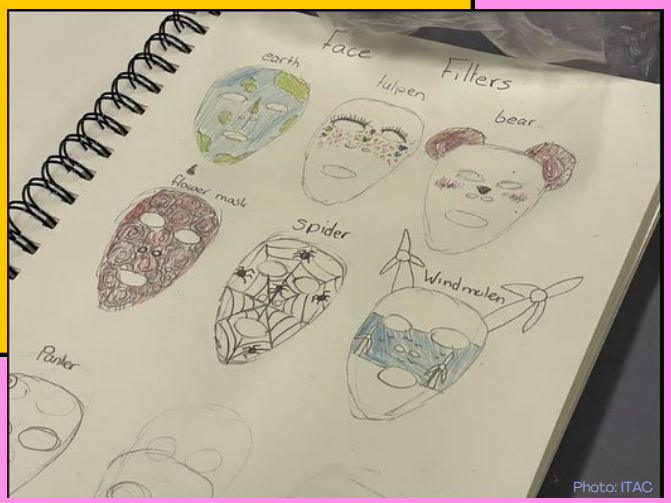


Photo: ITAC

THE SECOND GALLERY: ACTION RESEARCH (AR) IN PRACTICE

Color perception through other lenses...

Ninth color: Visual Arts

PROBLEM:

Students had a preconceived perception of their skills when it comes to drawing.

HUNCH:

If we use a drawing game format as a warm-up for our sessions, this would help loosen up the negative view they had about themselves.

EXPERIMENTS:

We started each session playing a game we invented, that would make the students draw, having prompts connected to elements of personal relevance.

DATA COLLECTION:

Students drawings (portfolio), surveys.

CONCLUSION:

Our students wanted to draw more and more, even when we were running out of time for the game. They eventually recognized they had some skills for visual arts, thus demonstrating change of perception. This kind of warm up developed into a habit for our teaching practice.

THE THIRD GALLERY: AIM'S ACTION RESEARCH FORMAT

Tableau V - Formatting Action Research

The working group who prepared this handbook for the teaching artist field used an Action Research format developed by the **Academy for Impact through Music** (**AIM**).

Eric Booth brought this format into AIM, and ITAC Innovator José Ángel Salazar was introduced to this approach through AIM. Eric distilled the format for AIM after lots of experience with action research and teaching artists, and José Ángel discovered its value working with teaching artists in AIM and his program El Sistema Greece.

We introduce this specific approach while encouraging teaching artists to learn from it and use it, but also to feel free to tweak it to serve their own needs better.

Please don't eliminate key elements, or you aren't doing action research anymore, but feel free to adjust to your specific situation.

THE THIRD GALLERY: AIM'S ACTION RESEARCH FORMAT

Tableau V - Formatting Action Research

This is AIM's approach.

Photo: AIM

Stage 1. Setup:

- Focal challenge. Identify a weakness or area for improvement. (e.g. "My students are too compliant; I want them to be more intrinsically motivated, more invested.")
- A hypothesis/theory/hunch about a better way of achieving a specific improvement in my teaching ("I bet that I can spark students' agency if I ...")

Stage 2. Taking action:

- Experiments. Plan a specific experiment to address the challenge that can be enacted over a period of time. ("So, this is what I am going to do over the next X weeks.")
- Collect documentation/data in the experiment. ("These docs will give evidence of what's happening regarding the experiment's impact.")

THE THIRD GALLERY: AIM'S ACTION RESEARCH FORMAT

Tableau V - Formatting Action Research

Stage 3.- Distillation:

- Analyze the data. Certainly, other kinds of information (like observation and verbal feedback) are to be included, but conclusions are based on the data collected. ("The data tells me this about the impact of my experiment.")
- Come to a conclusion. ("What I'd expected didn't really make a difference. But one part of it did.")
- Bounce. ("So, for the next X weeks, I have a hunch it will work if I try this...")

In our experience, these are some of the key challenges for educators who take on action research experiments:

- Selecting a specific experiment and sticking with it consistently over the time period.
- Choosing the documentation to generate that will be eloquent about the experiment's impact. There is an art to this, and practitioners get better with practice.
- Analyzing the documentation, letting it speak, and not imposing opinions and preferences on conclusions.

THE THIRD GALLERY: AIM'S ACTION RESEARCH FORMAT

Tableau VI - AIM's Firebird Artwork

INT. Francis Gagliardi, an AIM's Firebird Fellow of 2021 designs an Action Research for her student orchestra as part of her participation in the Fellowship. She receives mentorship and advice from AIM's coaches.

Francis writes...

Photo: AIM

AR Title: Developing Peer Interaction in Kipseli Orchestra

STAGE 1: Set up.

Focal challenge:

The musicians of the Kipseli Orchestra can follow the conductor, but they lack peer interaction, both within their specific sections and as an orchestra. I would like to help them develop a better ensemble dynamic by improving their visual and aural skills while playing. I want to find out if better social interaction can contribute to better musical results.

A hunch:

If I focus on the social and musical interaction between members of the orchestra, we will improve teamwork, agency, and holistic development, leading toward good musical results.

THE THIRD GALLERY: AIM'S ACTION RESEARCH FORMAT

Tableau VI - AIM's Firebird Artwork

STAGE 3: Distill.

Analyze the data

From the first to the sixth week, the students showed great improvement in their social skills: the dynamics and activities proposed resulted in students finding their common interests, better relating to each other, and supporting each other in their musical tasks, thus improving teamwork.

From the sixth to the twelfth week, students could identify each other's roles during their music music-making (melody, accompaniment, texture), which improved their performance in general.

Conclusion

Using dynamics and activities that promote social interaction not only helps students find their identity and sense of community but when guided adequately, also supports their musical development.

Bounce

Now that social dynamics are in place, and students' sense of community is strong, I wonder what will happen if they are given more space to discuss and decide upon their next steps in their musical development, or for the interpretation of a particular piece of music. I believe that if they are given such space for reflection and decision-making, and being guided during the process, they will be more intrinsically motivated to pursue further performance objectives.

EPILOGUE:

An invitation

Thank you for taking the time and care to put your mind and hands on this Handbook. We hope you feel, as do all of the practitioners whose work is shared here, that ***action research is just a slight formalization of the work that good teaching artists already do***. A little extra effort? —Yes. Worth it? We certainly think so; take a look at those benefits cited on pages 4-8, as a reminder.

The key benefit found by teaching artists who use action research is that it makes them better teaching artists, along with those other cited benefits. They internalize the steps that AIM uses in its protocol. You have probably noticed that the examples of practice in the tableaux colors on pages 9-26 show how the specific steps of the AIM protocol evolve in actual practice. Those teaching artists think and plan, using all the AIM steps, but the protocol has become their own strong practice, not an artificial set of requirements. ***This is what we mean when we assert that action research becomes a habit of mind***.

The *habit of mind leads a teaching artist to identify specific teaching challenges that matter, and then pick an issue they really care about improving*. The experimentation is specific, a step beyond "trying something" in general and "kind of" sensing whether it was useful. ***The habit of mind leads a teaching artist to design an experimental sequence with eloquent documentation that shows you and the learner and everyone else*** who cares (colleagues, program leaders, family) ***about the learning impact***. The ***habit of mind trusts analysis along with intuition and feeling***—this is professionalism. The habit of mind leads to continual experimentation.

It's the habit of mind of continual improvement. And that is what serves our learners best and inspires our colleagues to aspire higher in their teaching. It strengthens our program's impact and encourages greater funding. These are the habits of mind our field needs.

Experiment. And tell others about your experimentation. Tell fellow teachers; tell your students. Proudly claim that you are an action researcher. Use social media to let others know about your work in action research—you can inspire colleagues you haven't even met.

Please share this Handbook with your colleagues and program leaders. Let them know it has caught your interest, and that you'd like to talk about it with them. Encourage program leaders to consider Action Research as a program-wide practice. Like you, everyone involved in making this Handbook believes in the power of teaching artistry and knows these practices make us stronger.

Resource: AR Worksheets

Firebirds

Action Research

Map design document

AIM ACADEMY FOR IMPACT THROUGH MUSIC

Designed For:

Date: Answer here

Work on this document and then, once you are happy with your design/answers, complete this form to submit your Action Research summary.

Resource: AR Worksheets

AIM ACADEMY FOR IMPACT THROUGH MUSIC

FIREBIRD FELLOWSHIP 2023

Firebirds Action Research Map design document

Work on this document and then, once you are happy with your design/answers, complete this form to submit your Action Research summary.

01 Action Research Title

Give your Action Research Project a short and compelling title that summarises your area of focus, and that feels motivating for you as a Teacher and Action Researcher. Try to keep to 10 words

Example: Developing peer interaction in Kipseli Orchestra

Answer here

02 Action Research Time Period

Example: 6 weeks

Twice a week for 10 weeks

03 Action Research Focus

Summarise your action research focus here in one or two concise sentences, including what you want to improve or change. What challenge are you addressing? Why is this important? Between 25 - 50 words

Example: The musicians of the Kipseli Orchestra can follow the conductor, but they lack peer interaction, both within their specific sections and as an orchestra. I would like to help them develop a better ensemble dynamic by improving their visual and aural skills while playing. I want to prove if better social interaction can contribute to better musical results.

Answer here

04 Hypothesis/hunch

Your hypothesis should follow the following structure

"I have a hunch that IF... I do/take [this action] THEN... I believe it will result in [this outcome]". It is the overall idea underpinning your experiments—if we do XYZ, then we will address that focal challenge in a positive way. Between 25 - 50 words

Example: If I focus on the social and musical interaction between members of the orchestra, we will improve teamwork, agency, and holistic development, leading toward good musical results.

Answer here

Resource: AR Worksheets

AIM ACADEMY FOR IMPACT THROUGH MUSIC

FIREBIRD FELLOWSHIP 2023

Firebirds Action Research Map design document

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05

Experiment ideas (1, 2, 3)

Experiments are specific actions that you plan to try consistently over the 6 weeks to test out your hypothesis. It's great to focus on just one new idea, but you could try more. They are likely to evolve as you respond to what works and what does not work. It is better to focus on fewer consistent experiments at one time, to test their effectiveness. Ask yourself, "what information will I get from each experiment that let me know if my hypothesis-hunch was right?" Between 50 - 100 words

1 Example: 5 minutes of playful activities and dynamics at the beginning of every rehearsal to get to know each other better.

» Answer here

2 Example: After sight-reading each piece I will facilitate activities to understand the role of each member and the instrument they play in the orchestra.

» Answer here

3 Example: At the end of each session, a selection of various students, from different instrument sections, will play as a chamber music ensemble, without a conductor, in order to develop visual and aural interaction while performing. (All of this might happen from their positions in the orchestra, or split in different rooms)

» Answer here

Resource: AR Worksheets

AIM ACADEMY FOR IMPACT THROUGH MUSIC

FIREBIRD FELLOWSHIP 2023

Firebirds Action Research Map design document

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06

Documentation Section1.

What documentation can we produce during this experiment that will let me see and know the impact of the experiment? What kinds of data will be eloquent to reveal the effect of the experiment, and will not put too much pressure on the learning process?

Answer here

07

Looking for (1, 2, 3)

Looking for (1, 2, 3) What expectations and benchmarks will I be looking for in these experiments? What do I hope I will see and hear? How can I be ready to capture this evidence if it appears? Try to be specific.

1 Example: The students will demonstrate they know each other's names, the instruments they play and their positions in the orchestra. I will keep a teacher log of percentages of students who can use accurate names.

» Answer here

2 Example: Each student will be able to describe or demonstrate which instrument has the melody, and accompaniment, and when they play along with others. I will playfully ask during rehearsal, and note the percentage of students that give accurate responses.

» Answer here

3 Example: The students will look at each other and respond physically while playing. Their listening to other voices is evident in the music itself, with a greater range of dynamics and a stronger presence of the melodic line. I will videotape periodically to be able to see if they are doing this more as the six weeks unfold.

» Answer here

Resource: AR Worksheets

AIM ACADEMY FOR IMPACT THROUGH MUSIC

FIREBIRD FELLOWSHIP 2023

Firebirds Action Research Map design document

Work on this document and then, once you are happy with your design/answers, complete this form to submit your Action Research summary.

08

Possible tools

What tools will be helpful to understand the impact of these experiments? Do I need to record something? How will you track progress, generate eloquent documentation? Who will be involved in the experiments, in giving feedback?

What tools would be helpful to understand these experiments?

» Answer here

Do you need to record something?

» Answer here

How will you track progress?

» Answer here

Who will be asked to comment on your experiments and the results?

» Answer here

Choices include:

- [ ] Stopwatch/timer
- [ ] Audio clip
- [x] Video clip
- [ ] Habits tracker/stickers
- [x] Written notes
- [ ] Students' comments or observations
- [x] Hypothesis tracker
- [x] Other:

Resource: AR Worksheets

AIM ACADEMY FOR IMPACT THROUGH MUSIC

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Firebirds Action Research Map design document

Work on this document and then, once you are happy with your design/answers, complete this form to submit your Action Research summary.

09 Analysis of data

Looking at the documentation from the six-week experiment, what do these results tell me? You can include your experiences in determining impact, but base your conclusions on what you can objectively see in the data/documentation you collected.

e.g "The data tells me this about the impact of my experiment."*

Answer here

10 Conclusions

What conclusions can you draw from the data?
Can you connect your conclusions to specific pieces of evidence?

Answer here

11 Bounce

Based on the conclusions, what hypothesis and experiment do you want to try next?
e.g. "Since that part of the experiment proved to work, I have a hunch I should try this next." The ongoing cycle of experimentation-and-learning continues.

Answer here

CREDITS

The production of this handbook would not have been possible without the tireless work of a very passionate group of individuals and organizations, who believe in the potential of the arts education field and live every day making significant contributions to the work of teaching artistry.

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