Staff & Organization Development

CLASSROOM ACTION RESEARCH

Guidelines for Analyzing Your Data

- Design a systematic approach to analyze your data. This may develop as you become more comfortable with what you are learning.

- Do not be afraid to let the data influence what you are learning as you go deeper with your analysis.

- Look for themes and patterns to emerge. Look for those unique ideas that you had not considered which may influence your thinking.

- Make sure that you are organizing your data based on what you are actually learning from the data, not on the assumptions you bring with you to your analysis.

- Don't censor the data, even if you don't like what you are learning. Include data that doesn't necessarily reflect change or growth. All of this is part of the learning experience and can still inform our practice.

- Go through your data several times. New ideas will occur to you with a fresh perspective.

- Think about creating visual images of what you are learning. A grid, an idea map, a chart, or some visual metaphor are all possibilities to help make sense of the data and display a powerful presentation of your ideas.

- Write lots of notes to yourself (post-its work well) as you are sorting. This kind of reflection will help you as you step back and try to look at the big picture.

- Share your findings with a colleague. Do new questions emerge from this discussion?

- Let the data influence you. Jot down ideas for actions you will take as a result of what you are learning.

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A Process for Analyzing Your Data

In using qualitative research, you will be collecting and analyzing at the same time. These processes inform each other. Be open to new ways of thinking as you learn more from your data.

1. Go through everything you have collected. Make notes as you go.

2. Look for themes, patterns, big ideas. Key words and phrases can trigger themes. Determine these themes by your scan of the data, not on your preconceived ideas of what you think the categories are.

3. Narrow the themes down to something manageable. (3-5 of your most compelling and interesting)

4. Go back through all of your data and code or label information according to the themes in order to organize your ideas. Some ideas may fit into more than one theme. Create sub-groups under each theme.

5. Write continuously. Jot down what you are seeing, what questions are emerging, and what you are learning. Keep notes on those new ideas which are unanticipated. These may be findings or surprises which you had not planned.

6. Review your information after it is coded/labeled to see if there is

    - a frequency of certain items and/or

    - powerful, interesting, unusual comments or behaviors which are of particular interest to you. This may be an incident which gives you a new insight, and it may be one of the most important to hold on to.

7. Identify the main points which appear most frequently and are the most powerful. It will be hard to let go of some of your information, but it is important to sift through it.

8. Write up your major points. You can write them up by

    - theme,
    - chronologically, or
    - the different modes you used for collecting information.

9. Draw the information together to include some of the evidence which supports each of your themes. The reader should be able to draw conclusions based on the evidence you have presented.