

Conducting Action Research

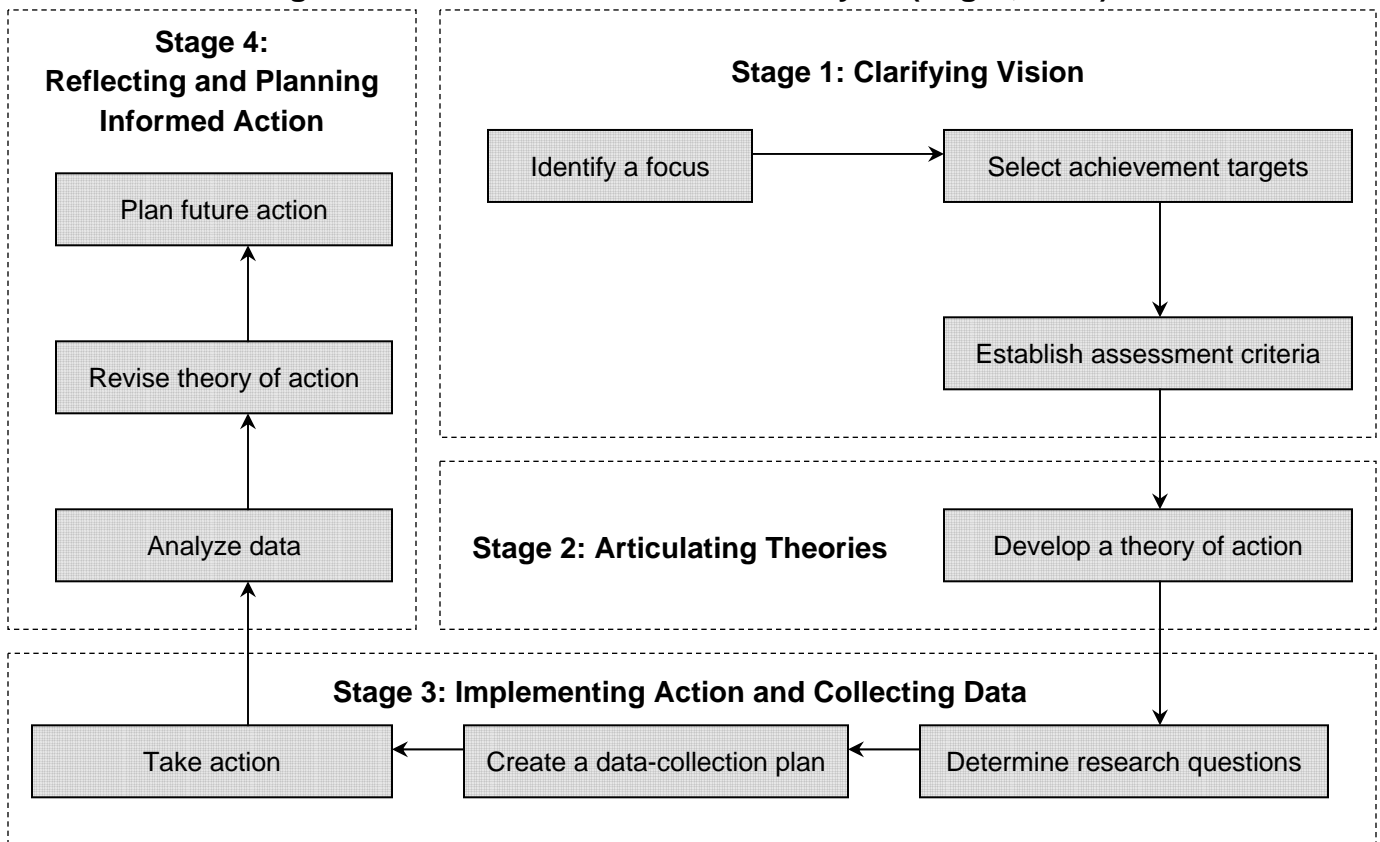
Dr. Richard Sagor, Educational Consultant, Author; Educational Leadership Program Director and Professor, Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon, USA; Founder of the Institute for the Study of Inquiry in Education

Dr. Richard Sagor's presentation provides a specific and detailed process for implementing an action research project in a school. He defines action research as "Investigations conducted *by* and *for* the people taking the *action*, on their *own action* to inform their future *actions*." Sagor addresses both the value of the principal as facilitator of teacher action research and the principal as action researcher. Principals participating in this workshop presentation found the step-by-step process and templates for each stage very relevant and applicable to the tasks they are expected to perform as part of the project.

Sagor's action research process consists of four stages:

1. Clarifying Your Vision/Targets (determining what you want to see – precise outcomes);
2. Articulating Your Theory (planning the best way to achieve or get to the outcomes);
3. Implementing Your Theory (acting out the plan and collecting data);
4. Reflecting on Results (examining the data to see what it tells and deciding how to act on it).

Sagor's Model: The Action Research Cycle (Sagor, 2005)



Contact:

For more information on Dr. Richard Sagor and his work, visit www.lclark.edu/faculty/sagor/

Resources:

- Book: *Sagor, R. (2005). The Action Research Guidebook: A Four-Step Process for Educators and School Teams.* Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.
- PowerPoint: A copy of Sagor's PowerPoint for the presentation is available. Go to the home page of your Principals' Association, click on the Leading Student Achievement button to access the website. Click on Symposia 2006 and then the Sagor PP icon.
- References to pages in Sagor's *Guidebook*: Sagor 2005, pages 1-2, etc.
- References to Sagor's PowerPoint slides: PP# 1-3, etc.

Segments (Disc 5):

- 1...Introduction
- 2...Definition of Action Research
- 3...Types of Action Research
- 4...Stage 1: Clarify Your Vision/Targets
- 5...Stage 2: Articulate Your Theory(s)
- 6...Stage 3: Implementation/Data Collection
- 7...Stage 4: Reflect on Results

1...Introduction

(Length: 13 minutes)

Synopsis:

Sagor introduces the topic of action research by recounting a humorous story of his flight to Toronto and the pilot's use of action research.

Look for the following:

- How Sagor's travel story illustrates the connection between theory and action
- Every teacher in every lesson is working on a theory and responding with action-but efficacy can be high or low
- Effective use of action research improves teacher efficacy
- When principals model the action research process, they take the risk out of action research for their teachers

After viewing Segment 1:

- Brainstorm examples of action research in the school and/or home.

2...Definition of Action Research

(Length: 15 minutes)

Synopsis:

Sagor defines action research, presents Glickman's *Compact for Continuous Improvement* model, and outlines three primary functions of action research.

Look for the following:

- Sagor's definition of action research
- Glickman's triangle model, *Compact for Continuous Improvement*, where his concept of "critical study" equates to action research
- Primary functions - Action research for: teacher development, school development, and personal development

After viewing Segment 2:

- Review the definition of action research, considering the value of the process.
- Discuss the value of action research as a source of professional development on a teacher level, school level and the personal level of the principal.

Digging Deeper:

- Sagor 2005, pages 1-5
- PP# 1-2

3...Types of Action Research

(Length: 8 minutes)

Synopsis:

Sagor describes two types of action research (AR) and introduces the four stages of action research.

Look for the following:

- Type 1 AR: descriptive studies-understanding what is
- Type 2 AR: quasi-experimental studies-testing theories
- 4 sequential stages of the action research process
- Leadership Mantra-what principals ask of teachers and themselves when engaged in action research

After viewing Segment 3

- Use Sagor's model, on the first page of this guide, from *The Action Research Guidebook* on page 7, to introduce the four stages of action research.
- Create a personalized template of the Leadership Mantra in the language you would use with yourself and your teachers.

Digging Deeper:

- Sagor 2005, pages 5-8
- PP# 3-5

4...Stage 1: Clarify Your Vision/Targets

(Length: 25 minutes)

Synopsis:

Sagor facilitates several activities that mirror Stage 1 of the action research process. This stage answers the question: What improvements in student or school performance would you like to see? The vision/target of implementing a professional learning community in a school is supplied and steps to clarify this vision/target are modeled.

Look for the following:

- Characteristics of a professional learning community as presented in the LSA project
- Instructions on how to select a target-participant activity
- Explanation of variables: dependent and independent
- Explanation of types of targets: achievement, process, and program
- Instructions on how to develop a rating scale-participant activity

After viewing Segment 4:

- Use Sagor's strategy with your colleagues to clarify your vision of your school as a PLC and develop a target(s). Choose 1 of the attributes of a PLC as a target.
- List other examples of the 3 types of targets: achievement, process, and program.
- Use Sagor's template for developing a rating scale on the PLC attribute chosen above or a target of your choice.

Digging Deeper;

- Sagor 2005, pages 11-48
- PP# 6-18

5...Stage 2: Articulate Your Theory(s)

(Length: 28 minutes)

Synopsis:

Sagor shares information on how to develop and use a theory of action. He leads participants through a series of activities that answer the question: What actions do you think would/could produce the desired results?

Look for the following:

- Visual depiction of relationship of vision/targets and theory-graphic
- Priority Pie Activity: Identifying the factors that must be addressed if one is to succeed with the identified target
- Graphic reconstruction: Road map for implementation of intended actions to reach the target-your theoretical perspective
- Sagors' example-Columbus' hypothesis
- Post-it Note activity to create graphic reconstruction
- Sagor's three generic research questions

After viewing Segment 5:

Use Sagor's interactive workshop process to develop a theory of action in implementing professional learning communities in a school. Sagor's graphics are available in his PowerPoint and *The Action Research Guidebook* or create your own. The following activities can be used with PLC targets:

- View the *Visual Depiction of Relationship of Vision/Targets and Theory* graphic.
- Using the rating scale you developed with your group in Segment 4, use the *Identifying the Variables* graphic to list the most significant factors that you will need to attend to if you are to succeed with this target, and then give a percentage to the importance of each factor.
- Then draw a *Priority Pie* graph to represent these percentages.
- Share the *Priority Pie* graph with your group, comparing the perspectives of each of you. Make changes in response to discussion. This pie graph is the beginning of your theory of what it would take to get your staff to outstanding performance on your target. It identifies what you need to focus on and helps you decide where to start.
- The next step is a process: *Graphic Reconstruction: Your Implementation Roadmap*. This activity will answer the question: What are the steps we need to take, the things we need to do, the places we need to go, and the actions we need to take to get from the current situation to the place we want to be?
- How to build your graphic reconstruction: *Post-it Note Activity*: Take one of the slices from your *Priority Pie*. On separate Post-it Notes, jot down every activity, action, problem, issue, factor, or variable that could come into play as you work to make your vision/target reality. Then take a large sheet of paper and arrange the Post-its in a manner that illustrates a detailed route to your desired destination. This is your implementation map.

Digging Deeper:

- Sagor 2005, pages 49-74
- PP# 19-39

6...Stage 3: Implementation/Data Collection

(Length: 8 minutes)

Synopsis:

This segment answers the question: How will you know if your actions are producing the desired results? Sagor leads participants through a data collection activity, outlines some sources of data and makes the connection between actions and student performance.

Look for the following:

- Data collection plan
- Some sources of data
- Trend analysis

After viewing Segment 6:

- *Data Collection Plan*: Think about the target that you worked with in segments 4 and 5, the attribute of a professional learning community that you used to construct a rating scale, a priority pie and the graphic reconstruction. Ask yourself the question: If we were doing this in our school, what data could we collect? Use Sagor's *Data Collection Plan* template to answer the research questions: What did we actually do? What improvement occurred on our targets? How did our actions influence these changes?
- Consider Sagor's list of data sources and add to the list from your own experience.

Digging Deeper:

- Sagor 2005, pages 90-108
- PP# 40-54

7...Stage 4: Reflect on Results

(Length: 8 minutes)

Synopsis:

Sagor outlines a strategy to answer the question: In what ways did your "theory of action" prove correct and/or how should it be modified, in light of your findings?

Look for the following:

- Revisit your graphic reconstruction
- Problems with Columbus' theory and world maps over 500 years
- Sample school policy for action research proposals

After viewing Segment 7:

- Put a plan in place to return to your graphic reconstruction after completing your plan of action and data collection. Then you will ask yourself: Is this still an accurate picture of reality as we currently understand it? Are there any factors, variables, or significant issues which should be added, deleted or modified?
- Plan to create a second graphic reconstruction of where you are after you've collected your data. Put the two graphics side by side for a BEFORE and AFTER picture.
- Reflect and revise your theory of action to plan your future action.
- Consider putting in place Sagor's *Sample School Policy*. Given adequate funding, it is our desire to approve all reasonable proposals for program initiatives. Approval will be based upon the presentation of credible data on effectiveness. If data is unavailable, approval will be based upon the presentation of a defensible theory accompanied by a workable data collection plan.

Digging Deeper:

- Sagor 2005, pages 109-154
- PP# 55-63