15. Action research and inquiry

Action research is an important professional and ethical Practice Tool that helps professionals to identify areas for improvement. Action research helps you address practice issues in ways that include others, and invites respectful collaboration using a team approach. The following inquiry process is adapted from action research literature.

**Step 1:** Identify the practice issue or topic you want to research and the reason why this is important, for example, by linking it to the *Code of Ethics, Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)* or *Framework for School Age Care (FSAC)*.

**Step 2:** Form an inquiry question.

**Step 3:** Plan the actions.

**Step 4:** Gather the data or evidence.

**Step 5:** Evaluate the outcomes and modify or replan.

**Step 6:** Disseminate the findings and outcomes.

A blank template is provided below for your research or inquiry project. An example follows on page 69 to support thinking about your own research topic or inquiry. Read the example before using the template to plan your own inquiry.

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### Action research example:

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| **Step 1:** Identify a topic or focus and your rationale or reasons for selecting this focus  
We are interested in improving children’s sense of belonging in our group because it is a core value of the EYLF and a core principle of the Code of Ethics.  
**Note:** You may start with a general question and refine it as you proceed further with the inquiry. | We talk about children belonging to our room but we haven’t reflected much on what that means and how we achieve it. We are especially concerned about how recently arrived refugee children in our group are experiencing belonging. | The room leader and the team. |
| **Step 2:** Frame an inquiry question  
What would be the outcomes for children if we focused more intentionally on their sense of belonging in the group? | It took us some time to decide on the question and we may change it as we progress the plans.  
Should we include families in the question? | The room leader and the team. |
| **Step 3:** Identify action plans  
Talk with other staff.  
Ask the children.  
Ask the families.  
Find and read an article on belonging and discuss implications.  
Identify current practices that support a sense of belonging.  
Use data from children and families to identify some new belonging strategies.  
Create a ‘Belonging’ wall where we can post photos and comments from educators, children and families.  
We made a ‘Belonging’ book using children’s and educators’ photos and words. | **Questions for children:**  
Who belongs to this group? Why?  
Why is it good to belong to this group?  
How do you know you belong?  
**Questions for families:**  
What does belonging mean to you?  
Does your child feel a sense of belonging in this group? Why?  
Are there ways we could strengthen their sense of belonging?  
Adapt questions if we need to.  
Document all the replies or comments. | The room leader and the team.  
Each educator will ask a small number of families and children so that the work is shared.  
The room leader will ask the other staff.  
The room leader will find some readings to support our inquiry project. |
| **Step 4:** Gathering the evidence to see what happens  
We noticed that children started to use the word ‘belonging’ with us and each other.  
We added focusing on our ‘welcome’ each morning to the action plan.  
Several parents used the sticky notes to add comments to our ‘Belonging’ wall. | One of the readings made us more aware of how important the welcome is each morning.  
We are being more conscious of this every day.  
We have learnt to say ‘hello’ in the four different languages that are spoken by families as part of our ‘welcoming’ strategies. | The room leader and the team.  
The room leader gave a brief update on the project at the staff meeting. |
| **Step 5:** Evaluate outcomes  
After two months inquiring and taking action to improve children’s sense of belonging in the group, we have evidence to show that:  
- children are settling more easily each morning, especially the new children  
- families are talking with us more each day, especially some families who said very little before the project  
- children are more aware of who is present or not each day and they seem more sensitive to each other  
- we feel more confident using words of welcome in other languages  
- we are more conscious about what belonging means and how to support it. | We will continue with our belonging focus so that we embed the practice changes.  
We will continue to document the outcomes we identify from practice changes related to strengthening the sense of belonging in the group.  
We will link outcomes from the project to the EYLF and our goals for the children as part of the Quality Improvement Plan.  
Families’ sense of belonging has deepened as well as the children’s. | The room leader and the team. |
| **Step 6:** Disseminate findings  
We want to talk about our project with families, children and other staff and maybe beyond our setting. | This was the first time we had used an inquiry or action research approach and we feel proud of what we discovered and achieved.  
We will be more confident to use this approach again.  
We learnt it is important to start with what we were doing well and then to plan new practices based on shared perspectives and our inquiry research. | We gave a shared presentation on the research project at a staff meeting.  
The room leader wrote an article about the project for the newsletter.  
We are putting in an abstract on our project for a local conference. |