

Critical friends

The role of critical friends in action research

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You may find it helpful to identify a critical friend who can support you with your action research. The term 'critical friend' or 'critical colleague' as first used by Stenhouse in 1975, who proposed that a critical friend, can give advice and can work with teacher-researchers during action research. This is also referred to as a 'learning partner' (McNiff, 2002).

A critical friend could be a colleague who is interested in what you are doing with your research. Their role is to listen as you talk through and clarify your ideas and who can provide honest and impartial feedback. This will help you to adopt a more independent stance towards your own action research project and to ensure that your research plan is coherent. As McNiff (2002) states, critical evaluation is a key component in maintaining the quality of your research.

Feldman, Altrichter, Posch and Somekh (2018) recommend the following steps when working with a critical friend:

1. Hold a preliminary conversation so that you can talk about the starting points of your research;
2. Move onto talking about ideas for the initial stages of the research.

They also argue that conditions for action research are more favourable when a small group of action researchers work together and can share experiences.

More information on working with critical friends

- Baskerville, D. & Goldblatt, H. (2009) Learning to be a critical friend: from professional indifference through challenge to unguarded conversations. *Cambridge Journal of Education* 39 (2): 205-221.
- Critical friends – Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) Guide 2014
<https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/change-management/critical-friends>
- Feldman, A., Altrichter, H., Posch, P. & Somekh, B. (2018) Teachers Investigate Their Work: An Introduction to Action Research across the Professions. 3rd edition. London: Routledge.
- Kember, D., Ha, T-S., Lam, B-H, Lee, A. NG, S. Yan, L. & Yum, J.C.K. (1997) The diverse role of the critical friend in supporting educational action research projects. *Educational Action Research* 5 (3), 463-481.
- McNiff, J. (2002) *Action Research for Professional Development*. 3rd edition. Downloadable from <http://www.jeanmcniff.com/ar-booklet.asp>
- Stenhouse, L. 1975. *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development*, London: Heinemann.