

Facilitating Character Education and Professional Development Through Evaluation and Action Research

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As one of the first states to receive federal funding for character education, Utah was also one of the first states to encounter the challenges of evaluating character education. To meet some of these challenges, the project used a collaborative evaluation model that involved participants in planning and conducting the evaluation. A significant focus was the professional development of educators in evaluation methods and action research. This article summarizes the staff development approach, teachers' reaction to the approach, and the importance of this type of approach for successful implementation and evaluation of character education.

Introduction

In 1995-96 Utah was one of the first four states, along with New Mexico, Iowa, and California, to receive federal funding for character education. At an early meeting of individuals representing these four projects, representatives from Iowa mentioned as part of their grant they had engaged in action research. Having been interested for 20 years in teacher-as-researcher issues, I was intrigued with the idea of incorporating action research into the evaluation of *Utah's Community Partnership for Character Development*. Therefore, a proposal was made to include professional development for teachers on action research and evaluation as a part of the evaluation of this project.

The evaluation utilized a collaborative model that involved participants in planning and conducting the evaluation. I met initially with the Evaluation Advisory Committee, which consisted of the project director, a statistician from the Utah State Office of Education (USOE), and a character education coordinator from each of the participating school districts. After discussing the proposed evaluation design and possible instruments, an evaluation plan was developed that included both formative and summative evaluation. Each evaluation activity was designed with four primary objectives: 1) to document the implementation of the project; 2) to evaluate the successful accomplishment of project goals; 3) to provide information that was useful to schools in evaluating individual initiatives; and 4) to provide comprehensive professional development for educators in action research and evaluation. These sometimes conflicting goals required a constant juggling act. Colleagues who were evaluators were skeptical about

giving major responsibility to educators for collecting and analyzing data, wondering how could I be sure of the accuracy of my information. Colleagues who were educators expressed doubt that teachers and administrators would support an evaluation that required intensive professional development, a great deal of time, and dedication. Nevertheless, I was determined to accomplish this for several reasons.

First, having a teaching and public schools background, myself, it seemed extremely important to "demystify" evaluation for educators, something that not many evaluators are willing or able to do. Second, I was committed to equipping the project participants with skills that would be useful to them when the grant ended—research and evaluation skills that would continue to help them plan, study, and modify their character development initiatives, as well as other school initiatives. Third, it seemed particularly important in a project devoted to character development, to model good character. Trusting the professionalism of educators, treating them as full-partners, and encouraging an open exchange of ideas, knowledge, and skills was not only the respectful thing to do, but would benefit the teachers, their students, and ultimately the profession.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework driving the action research approach to planning and evaluation were grounded in the work of Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995), Lieberman (1995), Sagor (1992, 1997), Sparks and Hirsch (1997), and others. Sparks and Hirsch (1997) argue that three important trends currently shape schools and staff development: (1) results driven education, systems thinking,

and constructivism. Action research seemingly provided the Utah Community Partnership for Character Development access to each of these important goals.

Results Driven Education. The Utah Community Partnership for Character Development modeled the principles of results-driven education. The school communities, considered to be parents, students, and business and community representatives as well as faculty and staff, were engaged in active dialogue about values and how to define and achieve good character. The desired outcomes were made explicit for teachers, students, and parents. As Sparks and Hirsch (1997) suggest, "results-driven education for students requires results-driven staff development for educators." The staff development must alter instructional behavior in a way that benefits students as, "the goal is improved performance—by students, staff, and the organization" (p. 5). Action research provided a new type of staff development where teachers became an integral part of planning and evaluating their character education approach. Teachers utilized the results from each cycle of action research in the modification of their ensuing actions.

Systems Thinking. One of the problems that has plagued education has been the appearance of new approaches and ideas that sweep the nation and then gradually disappear. These educational fads have contributed to the disillusionment of many teachers and an unwillingness to become involved in promising new initiatives. Sparks and Hirsch (1997) argue that reform has been approached in a piecemeal fashion, "because educational leaders typically have not thought systematically" (p.6). Educators in Utah were adamant about not wanting character education to become another passing fad. The leadership provided by the character education specialist at the USOE and school district personnel helped create a vision, focus, and framework for the partnership that encouraged schools to integrate character development throughout the entire school culture, thereby decreasing the likelihood that character education would end with the grant. Fritz (1997) believes that productive change occurs when we can articulate the results we want, understand current reality, develop strategies to achieve intended results, and then take action (cited in Sparks & Hirsch, 1997). This is remarkably similar to the collaborative action research process proposed by Sagor (1992). Once again action research presented itself as an important tool in bringing about lasting change in schools.

Constructivism. Those who ascribe to constructivist theory believe that learners create their own knowledge structures. Lieberman (1995) states: "people learn best through active involvement and through thinking about and becoming articulate about what they have learned. Processes, practices, and policies built on this view of learning are at the heart of a more expanded view of teacher development that encourages teachers to involve themselves as learners—in much the same way as they wish their students would (p. 592). To support this constructivist approach to learning it was important to model appropriate techniques during staff

development. The action research approach modeled the beliefs of Sparks and Hirsch (1997) who argue that rather than receiving "knowledge" from "experts" in training sessions, educators need to collaborate with peers, researchers, and their students to "make sense of the teaching/learning process in their own contexts" (p.11). Engaging in evaluation and action research was a perfect tool for accomplishing this.

Action Research

Sagor points out that collaborative action research addresses some of the problems that plague education, such as isolation from other professionals, exclusion of teachers from the production of knowledge about education, and subjection to external quality control (1992, 1997). He states that "one would have to look long and hard to find a single school endeavor that incorporates more of the essential findings of the change literature than collaborative action research" (1997, p.169). Character education and action research, when properly integrated, could provide the framework not only to change schools, but also to transform school communities and ultimately human relationships. In essence, action research seemed the perfect catalyst for authentic character education.

Evaluation in the "Real World"

As is often the case when conducting project evaluations in the "real world," as opposed to neatly designed dissertation projects or clinical studies, there were several problems in developing an adequate evaluation design. First, the complex structure of the grant presented an initial obstacle. Rather than starting with one group of schools and collecting data throughout the four years, schools entered and exited the grant every two years. Since each of these schools was in a different stage of development and implementation of character education, this made the collection of data quite complicated.

Second, due to Utah's emphasis on character education, schools participating in the grant had varying amounts of prior involvement in character development activities. Some schools had no experience, many schools had several years' experience, and some schools had extensive experience, as much as 10 to 16 years. Coupled with their varying amounts of prior involvement, schools were encouraged to individualize the project to fit their communities' needs. While the grant provided a common structure and framework, schools were deliberately encouraged to select their own values through a community consensus approach, adopt and develop their own materials, plan a variety of instructional strategies and approaches designed to meet local needs, and participate in additional professional development beyond that provided by grant-sponsored activities. As participants were told with tongue-in-cheek, "From an educational standpoint this is wonderful, but from an evaluation standpoint this is a real nightmare."

Third, the evaluation was implemented after the grant had begun and consequently, baseline data was collected well after the project's initiation. While this was problematic in some ways, it afforded the opportunity for more actively involving participants in planning the evaluation. Educators in participating schools were encouraged to use evaluation data for program planning purposes, as well as for evaluating the impact of their activities. They were cautioned to view each piece of data as only part of the picture and to be aware that these data must be mediated by other data sources and their professional judgment.

A final problem that presented itself was related to sampling procedures. There was a desire to obtain reasonably reliable data across the project as a whole, while providing results that would be useful to individual schools, in addition to attempting to control costs and decrease disruptions in the school. It sounds impossible. What often gives evaluators a bad name is their insistence on a rigid set of rules regarding how an evaluation must be conducted—how many must be tested or surveyed, when, where, and how the testing must occur—and an apparent lack of regard for the importance of instructional time and the real business of schools. Evaluation in the real world necessitates a compromise between pristine evaluation practice and the messy realities of schools. Therefore, when possible, the entire population was sampled, (e.g., all teaching and administrative staff at all schools). When this was not possible due to the sheer size of the population (thousands of students in more than a hundred schools participating in the partnership), randomly selected intact classes of students and their parents were surveyed. While the small samples of students and parents did not allow schools to reliably generalize the results to their schools, they provided an adequate sample across the project to evaluate changes in student knowledge of values, behavior, and morale.

Professional Development for Grant Participants

Professional development in evaluation occurred at practically every grant-sponsored activity, though each year was a bit different. Educators from participating schools reviewed character education surveys for possible use in evaluating the project, made suggestions regarding evaluation activities and timelines, helped develop and administer evaluation instruments, and analyzed both quantitative and qualitative data. Workshops varied from two hours to a full day depending on the topic and the time available: they were always interactive, required dialogue and reflection, and involved small group work as well as whole group presentations. The professional development included five components: 1) an overview of evaluation, 2) how to analyze quantitative information, 3) how to analyze qualitative information, 4) how to interpret and use evaluation results to modify character initiatives, and 5) an introduction to action research.

Overview of Evaluation. This component discussed what evaluation is and why we do it, how to conduct a sound

evaluation, different approaches taken to evaluation, and sources of data that exist in schools. Participants learned the importance of design, sampling, use of multiple measures, and standard procedures to the validity and generalizability of an evaluation. They also explored the many sources of archival data existing at their schools available for individualizing the project evaluation. Finally, the idea was stressed that although evaluation is often required for federally funded projects, the most important reason to evaluate is to help us better meet the needs of students.

Analyzing Quantitative Information. As part of the project evaluation, the Character Development Survey (CDS) was developed and administered as both a pre and post survey to staff, parents, and students.¹ The CDS for all three groups contained a common core of items measuring kindness/caring, respect/responsibility, fairness/honesty, and school expectations. The parent survey contained additional items measuring parent involvement and parent-staff relationships, while the faculty survey contained corollary items on these topics and items measuring school climate, staff relationships, and involvement in character development activities. Workshop participants learned how to tally responses on the CDS, compute means, and compare mean scores of the three groups of survey respondents. They also discussed the advantages and disadvantages of quantitative data and how to decide when to use numerical data.

Analyzing Qualitative Information. Educators involved in the Utah Community Partnership for Character Development collected parent, student, and staff responses to three open-ended questions as part of the project evaluation. Using previously collected data from a real student population they learned a process to analyze the responses, interpret the results, and suggest areas of further inquiry based on questions that occurred during the analysis. They also discussed the advantages and disadvantages of qualitative data and how to decide when to use this approach. They then applied this knowledge to the analysis of their own data collected from students, parents, and staff and prepared a report summarizing their findings.

Interpreting and Using Evaluation Results. The evaluation process emphasized the interpretation and use of results to implement and refine character initiatives. By analyzing their own school's responses on the CDS, educators became very familiar with the data and any discrepancies among groups. They also received written instruction on how to interpret the results, compare the responses of the three groups, and use the data to suggest areas that could be addressed by their character initiatives. Grant participants were encouraged to share evaluation results with the actual survey respondents as well as other interested groups, in addition to inviting their participation in analyzing and responding to the information. A similar process was utilized for the analysis and interpretation of the open-ended questions that supplemented the CDS. Schools prepared a written report that emphasized a thorough analysis of the data along with how an indication

of how they would use the data and other areas they might investigate based on the results. To model the importance of sharing evaluation results, I provided each school with copies of their survey results and all evaluation reports.

Introduction to Action Research. The final area addressed in staff development was action research. Each year, new schools were involved in a half to full day introduction to action research. This workshop delineated the importance of action research to decreasing teacher isolation, developing a sound knowledge base with input from practitioners, and empowering teachers. Participants were exposed to the five steps of action research: problem definition, data collection, data analysis, reporting, and action planning. They also engaged in a reflective and analytic process, learned how to conduct interviews, and presented research ideas using visual tools. The option of continuing with additional professional development in action research was offered to educators and many expressed an interest. However, due to the many days of professional development required by other grant activities and a lack of funding, it was decided to postpone the workshop series until a later date.

Action Research Revisited

As part of Utah's continuing commitment to character education and professional development, several major character education conferences are offered each year focusing on a myriad of topics for new and experienced character educators. At the Community Conference conducted in October of the 1999-2000 school year, 150 educators from all over the state participated in an introduction to action research and were invited to send a school team to three additional workshops. The remainder of this article will describe the type of professional development in which educators engaged, how action research was used to facilitate character education and professional development, and educators' responses to the experience.

Workshop Participants. Twenty-five educators representing 17 schools, nine school districts, and the USOE committed to attending the entire series. The participants were elementary and secondary teachers, counselors, principals, district coordinators, and the state character education specialist. While schools were encouraged to send a team of at least two people due to the greater likelihood of success for action research when more than one educator participated, interested and motivated individuals were not excluded. Only two educators dropped out due to personal and health-related reasons and there were very few absences.

Workshop Format. The first workshop was held in October and three additional workshops occurred every other month, in February, April, and June. This format was utilized to provide participants' time to apply the material introduced in each workshop. Prior to each workshop, participants were contacted and reminded of the topic of the next workshop, the time and location, the articles they should have read,

and the materials they were to have prepared to share. Each school was provided with a copy of *How to Conduct Collaborative Action Research* (Sagor, 1992) as well as other articles pertinent to workshop topics. While the major focus of the workshops was action research, each workshop featured a whimsical theme as well as emphasized the importance of brain-related research to character development and good teaching. The three areas highlighted were humor, movement, and the arts. Participants were encouraged to bring something unusual each time related to the focus of the workshop—something humorous to share, an effective movement activity, a favorite arts idea, or a unique teaching prop, etc. This greatly promoted a sense of camaraderie and fun among the group members, resulted in the modeling of many effective teaching ideas, and facilitated a feeling of competence and shared responsibility for learning.

Each workshop consisted of an instructional component delivered with a variety of traditional and progressive methods, application of content in individual and small group activities, synthesis of learning through large group discussion and sharing, and evaluation of workshop activities and processes. Participants also received extensive resources including articles and annotated bibliographies of books and web sites. During the workshop series participants learned how to: 1) identify an appropriate topic for investigation, 2) conduct interviews, 3) develop surveys, 4) analyze archival, interview and survey data; 5) prepare a report summarizing their findings, 6) make a dynamic presentation to a variety of stakeholders, and 7) use action research results to modify character education initiatives.

Since one of the goals was to encourage participants to make presentations at professional meetings and conferences, seek opportunities for publication, and continue to engage in action research, information and resources were provided and modeled to facilitate this process. Prior to the last workshop participants were asked to indicate which groups they would be most likely to present to and which presentation styles they were likely to utilize; final activities were then planned based on their needs. For example, topics included how to make a dynamic presentation taking into account the needs of adult learners; how to develop rapport with an audience; what to consider when preparing; how to focus a presentation, how to present a coherent body of information, how to summarize, how to facilitate action, etc. Participants were provided with information about upcoming professional meetings and conferences, as well as places to publish their action research, in addition to the opportunity to publish their research in a booklet being distributed by the USOE.

Facilitating Character Education and Professional Development Through Action Research

The purpose of the action research series was to facilitate character development initiatives as well as to provide professional development to educators. Each team

selected a topic of interest related to their character education initiative which met the essential criteria outlined by Sagor (1992): 1) it involved teaching and learning, 2) it was within their sphere of influence, and 3) it was something they cared deeply about. There was a great deal of variety in the research topics selected including:

The use of character education materials in a school library, a district character education needs assessment, reactions to a middle school student advisory period used for character development, the effects of a buddy reading project at an elementary school, an investigation of extent and type of service projects conducted at an elementary school, a school climate inventory, use of rewards and recognition in an elementary school for exemplary character, a district wide survey of how character education is being addressed in the schools, an investigation of teacher professional development in character education and use of character related teaching practices, and a study of the effects of a reading intervention with at risk junior high students.

Educators' Responses to Action Research

In general, holistic, naturalistic, and qualitative approaches were used to assess the effects of the action research experience on participants (Patton, 1987). This consisted of observations of changes in educators during the eighth months of workshop evaluations and open-ended written comments on workshop evaluations and open-ended written reflections, and a review of action research projects. The qualitative information was supplemented with quantitative survey data collected at the end of each workshop and at the end of the series. At the last session a posttest survey was administered that retrospectively measured changes in educators' self-perception, the effects of action research on character education initiatives, the effectiveness of the workshop series, and how action research contributed to their professional development. The survey used a five point Likert-type scale (where a score of 1 indicated "strongly disagree" and 5 indicated "strongly agree") to measure participants' agreement with 20 statements about action research. Means were calculated for each item and are reported in the discussion below and in Table 1.

An analysis of these six sources of data indicates that participating in action research: 1) changed educators' perceptions about research and teaching; 2) improved planning, implementation, and modification of character education initiatives; 3) improved communication among members of the school community, 4) resulted in more effective educational practices; and 5) resulted in the desire for continued professional development in action research.

Changed Perceptions about Research and Teaching. For more than two-thirds of the participants, action research changed the way they thought about research ($X=4.13$) and even teaching ($X=3.87$). It was fascinating to watch

participants' hesitation and confusion about the whole process change as they became more knowledgeable and confident. This change was particularly evident between the second and third workshops—coinciding with their first experience in collecting and analyzing data. They were hooked—as Sagor (1992) has so often noted in his work on action research with educators. One participant who was initially skeptical about the validity of action research due to his educational psychology background expressed amazement at the third workshop that the simple surveys he developed had given him "exactly what he needed." He became one of the most enthusiastic and prolific researchers, developing five different surveys related to character education in his district. Another person said in personal reflections, "Research has always been a little 'stuffy' for me and maybe I have felt inadequate, to say the least! But, I think you brought it down to our level and made me feel that I could be successful. Another participant wrote, "Thanks for taking a sterile subject and making it palatable."

Improved Character Education Initiatives. Participants felt action research provided a useful tool to improve their character education initiatives ($X=4.67$) and in addition would be helpful in assessing the effectiveness of other school initiatives ($X=4.87$). They remarked that the process enabled them to focus, determine needs, and collect useful information to plan or modify character initiatives. One participant reflected,

Being involved in the action research process has given me a solid direction and base in which I can get information and then act on that information. It has helped give our district a real direction in which we can move as facilitators and also gives us material from the surveys that we can use to support the actions that we are taking. It has given us some credibility in trying to incorporate character education into all the schools.

Another said, "This process has helped us determine the beliefs of our community and school staffs. Acting on those perceptions, we could then develop an action plan (in character education) for our school district." A middle school teacher commented, "I have enjoyed learning about this process because of the validity that research gives to my passion for character education. I have also learned that it is very important to look at things objectively instead of subjectively all the time." An elementary teacher said, "By going through the process of doing a project, I feel that I have better defined what it is that I would like to know. Now I can refine my survey to work towards gathering the data that will help me reach my goals" (in character education). Finally, an elementary counselor indicated that action research had enabled her to determine if character education programs were working and had provided helpful information about students that she had not been aware of.

Improved Communication. Many of the educators commented that action research had improved communication in some way. They believed that it contributed to positive relationships with colleagues ($X=4.27$)

Table 1
Frequencies and Means of Response to Action Research by Utah Educators

ITEM	<i>N</i>	FREQUENCY					<u>MEAN</u>
		1	2	3	4	5	
I understand and can apply each of the steps of the action research cycle.	15				6	9	4.60
I am planning to share the results of my action research project with my school/district.	15				2	13	4.87
I am planning to use action research in my classroom/school/district next year.	15				2	13	4.87
I am planning to involve others in my school/district in action research.	15			2	3	10	4.53
I intend to pursue making a presentation at a professional conference.	15	1	3	5	1	5	3.40
I intend to pursue writing an article for publication in a journal.	15	3	4	4	2	2	2.73
Participating in action research changed the way I think about research.	15		1	2	6	6	4.13
Participating in action research changed the way I think about teaching.	15		2	3	5	5	3.87
Participating in action research contributed to positive relationships with my colleagues.	15	1		1	5	8	4.27
Participating in action research gave me an opportunity to reflect on my practice.	15				5	10	4.67
Participating in action research renewed my enthusiasm for teaching/administration.	15				4	11	4.73
Participating in action research made me feel more powerful as a teacher/administrator.	15				6	9	4.60
Participating in action research gave me an opportunity to discuss education with my colleagues.	15				5	10	4.67
Participating in action research contributed to my professional growth as an educator.	15				4	11	4.73
Action research provided a useful tool to improve our character education initiative.	15		1		2	12	4.67
Action research will be helpful in assessing the effectiveness of other school initiatives.	15				2	13	4.87
I gained many useful ideas from the workshops for incorporating humor, movement, and the arts into my work.	15			2	4	9	4.47
The handouts and resources I received in the workshops were valuable to me.	15				5	10	4.67
The workshop format of providing time between presentations to work on each step of the action research cycle made a big difference in effectiveness.	15				1	14	4.93
Participating in the action research workshops was time well spent.	15				1	14	4.93

and provided an opportunity to get feedback from teachers, parents, and community members. For example, one person said, "This has been a very positive experience for me. Action Research is a great way to analyze what is happening in a school and provide a means for school personnel, parents, and students to give feedback to the school to improve it. It is pretty non-threatening, but gives some good feedback." An administrator remarked, "Action research has allowed me to focus on simple steps to acquire information from my faculty. I was surprised at the results because responses showed trends and revealed attitudes." Another workshop participant said that action research brought "people together in communication."

Improved Educational Practice. The workshop participants expressed the opinion that participating in action research gave them an opportunity to discuss education with their colleagues ($X=4.67$) and to reflect on their practice ($X=4.67$). Not only did they believe it had contributed to their professional growth as educators ($X=4.73$), they also felt empowered ($X=4.60$) and experienced a renewed enthusiasm for teaching and administration ($X=4.73$). Another felt that action research had enabled them to coordinate their plans with their needs that would result in more effectively serving students. A third participant wrote, "Thanks—this experience has been revolutionary! We are now more committed to evaluation than we have ever been." An elementary educator expressed the following opinion: "Action research is just wonderful because it has been a way to validate my personal beliefs about what things are really important in education. It has also given me a chance to look at different aspects of the educational process that need improving." Finally, an administrator remarked, "This action research workshop has taught me the importance of asking questions! We don't often enough ask someone else's opinion or ideas for solution."

Perhaps the most moving experience during the action research process was the transformation in attitude and feelings of efficacy of a new teacher. At the second workshop, the teacher was visibly distressed by her perceived inability to meet the needs of the extremely poor readers she was teaching. She had identified that their poor behavior in school resulted from their inability to read and was desperately trying to make a difference in their lives. She spent much of the workshop in earnest conversation with other teachers about this dilemma. Two months later, the transformation was astonishing. She came in beaming and began to tell me about the exciting changes she had made in her classroom and the way in which she was teaching reading based on her research of effective reading practices. At the end of eight weeks her students had made rapid and substantial gains as measured by a standardized reading achievement test. As she reflected on the action research process during the last workshop she wrote, "This process has totally changed my teaching practices. I am not afraid to change what I'm doing if it is not helpful for my students. I am also excited to see the hard data collected as a positive affirmation of my work. I know I can use this to increase

support for what I am doing (hopefully to obtain grants!) and also to help teach others these methods."

Continued Professional Development. Participants were encouraged to share the result of their action research with others through meetings, presentations, and publications. Although only some of the participants expressed the desire to write an article for publication ($X=2.73$), more were interested in making a presentation at a professional conference ($X=3.40$), and almost everyone was committed to sharing the results of their action research with their school communities ($X=4.87$). They all planned to use action research in their classrooms, schools or districts during the next school year ($X=4.87$) and many indicated they were going to involve others in action research as well ($X=4.53$). Their intentions were evident in their presentations at the last session and in their open-ended reflections. "I am also anxious to apply action research to other areas of interest in my school." "I am looking forward to staying in contact with you as I continue on in this process." "In fact, we are implementing two new programs next year and it would be a great time to do research on the effects of a new program." "We will continue to use it (action research) in the future to mold and shape the school atmosphere and learning environment." "I'd like to say that this process will be an annual event." Participants requested the opportunity to meet annually to provide support to each other, to engage in continuing professional development in action research, and to address how they might expand action research to include others in their schools/districts. In addition, several of the participants expressed an interest in co-presenting at a series of action research workshops to be conducted in Southern Utah during the 2000-01 school year.

Summary

The action research series appeared to be a transformational professional experience for many of the participants. As an educator and researcher I am curious to know how many will continue to engage in action research, what kind of obstacles they will encounter during the new school year, and how significant the experience will be for them in the long run. I concur with Sagor (1992) in the importance of providing opportunities for educators to contribute to the professional knowledge base by presenting and publishing what they have learned. Although not everyone was interested in making a presentation at a conference or publishing an article in a journal, they were committed to locally sharing the results of their research, submitting a paper for publication in USOE's action research booklet, and in making presentations at the next series of action research workshops.

What seems clear is the importance of administrative support for teacher participation in action research (Bennett, 1993; Calhoun, 1994) as the best of intentions can be overcome by the many pressing concerns that make up a teacher's day. If action research is to become a permanent

part of teachers' professional roles, they will need administrative support; continued professional development; opportunities to reflect on classroom practices, apply research findings, and share results; and the availability of easily accessible information and resources about action research (Bennett, 1993). The USOE is supporting action research through the establishment of partnerships with universities and school districts that engage in action research, by offering continued professional development and meetings of action researchers, and by providing opportunities for educators to make presentations about character education and action research at a variety of conferences that occur annually. It is hoped that this support will help validate the importance of action research and will make inquiry and reflection a permanent part of the educational profession.

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