



Action Research and Place-Based Learning

Action for Neighbourhood Change is a unique learning initiative that will explore and assess approaches to locally-driven neighbourhood revitalization that can enhance the capacity of individuals and families to build and sustain strong, healthy communities.

What is Action Research?

Sometimes known as 'participatory research' or 'action learning', action research is, simply put, 'learning by doing'. When a group of people identifies a problem, does something to resolve it, sees how successful they were, and applies what they've learned to see if that improves their results, they are doing action research.

Action research differs from other research methodologies in a number of ways. Firstly, action research takes place in real-world situations and aims to solve real problems. Action researchers study a problem or situation in an analytical way, while at the same time applying what they learn to see how this affects research outcomes. Lessons learned in the process of analysis are applied in an ongoing fashion, creating a cycle of informed change.

This engaged, co-learning collaboration between the researcher and other participants is an important part of the action research process. Because people learn best and are more willing to apply what they have learned when they do it themselves, action research turns everybody involved into researchers too.

The process of action research is cyclical in nature, with 4 basic steps: planning, action, observation, and reflection. These four steps are repeated as new approaches are tried, informed understanding increases and practical solutions to the issue in question emerge.

Place-Based Learning

Another important aspect of *Action for Neighbourhood Change* is its emphasis on 'place-based' learning. Unlike learning that focuses on abstract theories or truths, place-based learning is rooted in the unique history, environment, culture and economy of a particular place. The local community provides the context for learning, studies are focussed on community needs and interests, and community members serve as resources and partners in every aspect of the learning process.

This local focus has the power to combine intellectual rigour with 'real world' relevance while promoting a high level of active community citizenship and engagement. Place-based learning helps community members and the community get better together.



A Growing Trend

Over the last fifty years, action research and place-based learning have emerged as important tools for community building and revitalization. Together, these systematic approaches for addressing complex local issues have helped citizens work together to draw strength from each other and their diverse local knowledge and perspectives, and take leadership in developing high quality community-based solutions.

One excellent Canadian example is the Vibrant Communities initiative. Launched in 2002, Vibrant Communities is a collaborative, grassroots, learning initiative linking 15 communities across the country in an effort to reduce poverty. Following basic principles of action research and place-based learning, Vibrant Communities helps people work collaboratively to create intersectoral partnerships, identify local community assets and share their learnings whether they are the product of successes or failures.

Vibrant Communities is jointly supported by the Tamarack Institute and the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, two of the leading partners in *Action for Neighbourhood Change*.

For more information about *Action for Neighbourhood Change* please visit our web site at www.anccommunity.ca.