Action Research
as an Enhancement of Natural Problem Solving

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I think of action research as an extension of a natural approach to problem solving. Faced with a novel situation we often first investigate. We then develop an intention to act, and carry it out. We notice if it worked. Action research similarly cycles between intention, action and review. To this natural process it adds certain important enhancements. The review component is strengthened. Rigour and theory are given more attention. More care is given to identify who else should be involved, and how. Flexibility is strengthened. A variety of processes are used, many borrowed from other literatures and practices.

This paper begins with a broad overview of action research from this perspective. Different aspects of my own variations on this approach are then examined and described in more detail. As I examine my use of action research, I illustrate my comments with examples. Most of these are taken from a university class I facilitated for many years.

Key words: Action research, flexibility, rigour, theory building, data-driven research, participation, meta-methodology

1. Action research in overview

Imagine what happens when you’re confronted with a novel situation to which you have to respond. At least some of the time, you are likely to try to get some more information to increase your understanding. When you have a sufficient understanding you may plan an action and try it out. You are then