

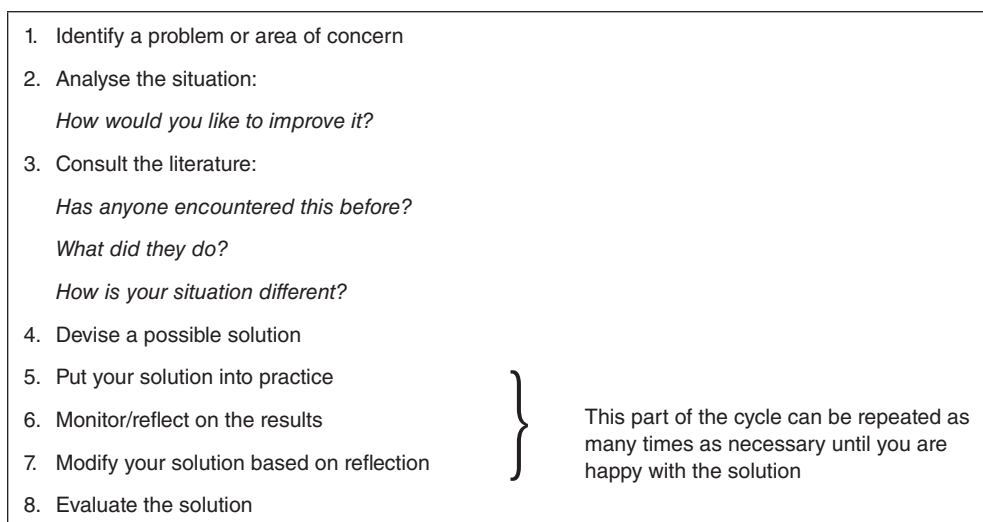
# ACTION RESEARCH

During your training you will probably have engaged with some research for either a dissertation or other assignment work and will be familiar with some of the terminology associated with research. This section may also be of use to you if you are starting work on an area of research for your training or if you are mentoring a trainee who is involved with research.

Action research is the name given to practical research which you may undertake in your own classroom or school in order to investigate and improve an aspect of your current practice. Many successful action research projects later feature in journals, so this is a positive way in which you can contribute to the teaching profession, as well as to your own professional practice.

Action research differs from other forms of research which you may consider because it is immediately useful in improving classroom practice.

There are a number of distinct stages you will need to progress through when starting action research (Figure 10.1).



**Figure 10.1** Steps for action research

Let us consider the different stages and how you might engage with these.

## 1. Identify an area of concern

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As reflective practitioners we are constantly monitoring and reflecting on our practice and will identify a number of areas which could be improved. The key here is to identify an area which will benefit from more extended research and may be of value to colleagues either as a matter of interest or, perhaps, for them to collaborate with you or to adapt their own practice based on your findings.

### Case Study

Calista has been working with a large mixed ability Year 7 class. She is frustrated as she finds herself 'teaching to the middle'. She is finding it difficult to develop strategies to adequately support the lower ability pupils (some of whom have literacy and numeracy difficulties) without stigmatizing them or to stretch and challenge sufficiently the higher ability pupils.

## **2. Analyse the situation**

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It is important to dedicate some time to thoroughly exploring and analysing the situation as you currently perceive it. The aim is to identify all of the issues which may be impacting on the situation and to explore some possible solutions which may warrant further investigation. You can conduct this analysis in a number of ways, including through idea storming, discussions with colleagues, keeping a reflective account or diary on the situation and analysing this or writing down your thoughts. Whichever method you choose, you should try to capture it permanently so that you can revisit it later in your research.

Calista decides to capture her analysis using a mind map (Figure 10.2). The mind map helps her to explore some of the issues, identify some possible solutions, but it also raises a number of question for her which would need to be investigated further. There will be an opportunity to do this as Calista moves into the next stage: consulting the literature.

## **3. Consulting the literature**

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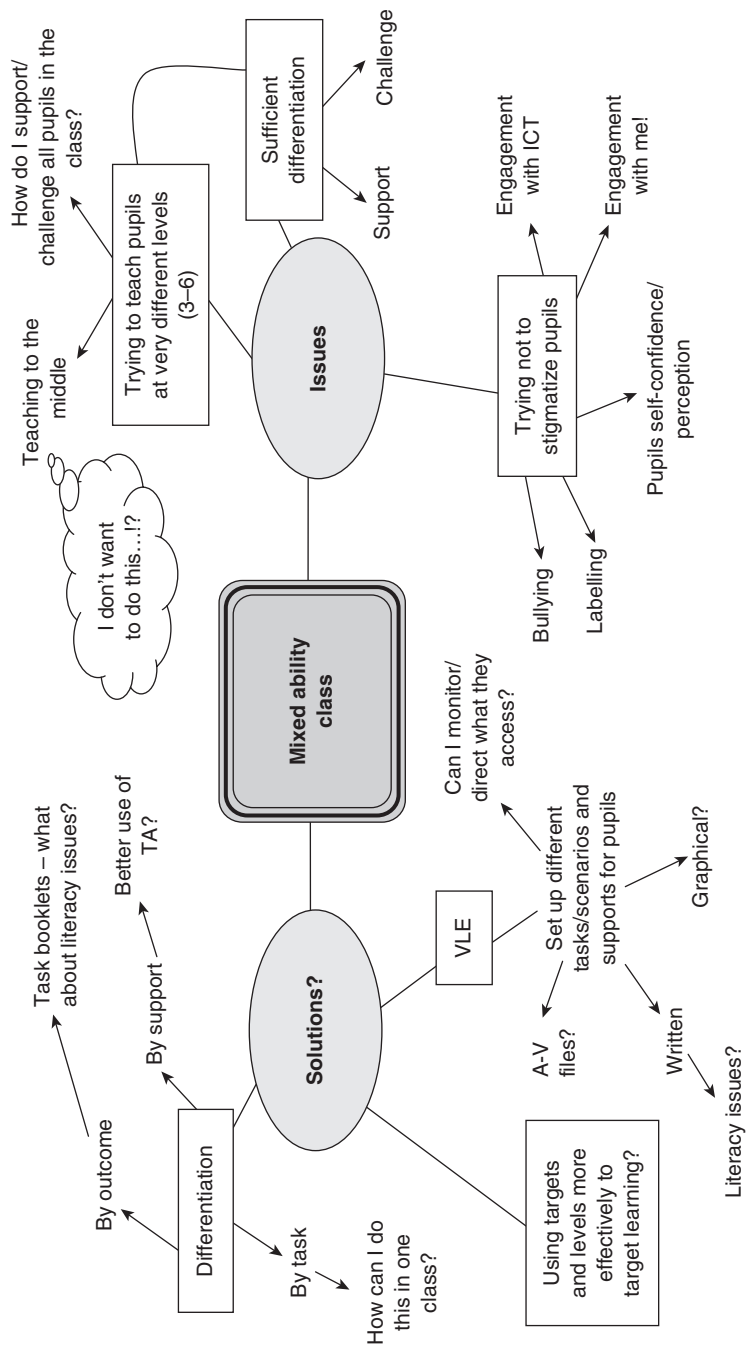
A literature search should let you identify any research on the topic which has been undertaken by others. You will be frustrated if you invest significant time and energy undertaking primary research and then find out that someone else has previously explored the same issue in the same way: it is better to learn from them. You may find, though, that similar studies have not thoroughly addressed the aspects of the problem which interest you. For instance, in her literature search, Calista located research on differentiation and using target-setting, but did not find any research on using audio-visual files through a VLE to personalize learning for pupils within the same class. Calista, therefore, decides that this will be the focus of her action research.

The literature search should also be used to expand your knowledge and understanding of the topic. If done correctly, it will allow you to refine (and sometimes redefine) your thinking on the topic in question. You will be better informed for designing and completing your research.

## **4. Devise a possible solution**

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Through your exploration of the topic so far, you should now be at a stage to start to design a solution to the problem.



**Figure 10. 2** Example mind map analysis for action research

### **Case Study**

Calista has heard about video tutorials and wishes to explore this to see if it could be used to better support all her pupils. She attends a training session and believes that this could be a solution. The next unit she will be teaching is on modelling. She decides to deliver the unit through a blend of online and face-to-face teaching, using the video tutorials to provide additional support to lower ability pupils and to provide extension material for higher ability pupils.

## **5. Putting your solution into practice and monitoring the results**

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Once your solution has been designed, then stages 5, 6 and 7, in Figure 10.1, go hand-in-hand. Before you implement your solution you should consider how you will monitor and evaluate it. How will you know it is a success? Will you use statistical data from previous year groups? Will you have a control group? If you teach another class within the same year group, then this would be easy enough to achieve. Alternatively, you may want to enlist the help of a colleague who is keen to collaborate on the project.

This part of the cycle can be repeated until you (and any collaborators) are happy with the results: modifying the solution based on the data you are collecting and your own reflections on the success of the project.

## **6. Evaluating the solution**

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At the end of the project you need to take time to reflect on the success of your solution as well as the stages you have gone through in order to arrive at a satisfactory solution. This process of reflection will help you to consolidate what you have learnt, not just from the project but also about the methodology you have employed, enabling you to approach future research more confidently.

By following the stages in a systematic manner and documenting each step, you also provide a historical route map through your own research journey. As well as the results from your action research project, you also have a valuable resource for other people who may be starting out on their first action research project: this in itself can be worth publishing.

## **7. Sharing your findings**

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While your action research is valuable to you, it may also be of interest to the wider profession. An excellent way of contributing to the profession is to share your findings more widely. There are a number of ways you might consider doing this. If you are a member of a professional association they will welcome papers submitted for publication in their periodical. Equally they may hold conferences or other events where you could present a workshop session or poster presentation. If you are more confident and seek a wider distribution you may submit your research article to a professional journal – do not be disheartened if it is rejected at first, it may be that the scope of your research does not match the journal's remit.

Sharing your findings is always daunting for a first-time researcher, but your research is valuable to the profession. If you are hesitant about research and sharing your findings try to find a colleague to collaborate with: this makes the research journey easier.