



Zoo and Aquarium Action Research Collaborative

Co-PIs: Andee Rubin, TERC & John Falk, OSU

Be an Animal Scientist

Be an Animal Scientist gives participants the opportunity to become scientists by observing and recording the behavior of animals through observing an actual animal exhibit or through a fun and interesting kinesthetic activity designed to familiarize students with animal behaviors involving simulations.

Project Overview

- A 2 ½-year research project exploring a collaborative model for action research.
- Zoo and aquarium educators study visitor engagement and learning.
- Project staff study how zoo and aquarium educators learn to carry out action research.
- Evaluator studies the collaborative model and institutional impact.

Action Research

- A practice where educators conduct research in order to solve challenges present in their everyday work life. (Kelly)
- A living, emergent process which cannot be pre-determined but changes and develops as those engaged deepen their understanding of the issues to be addressed. (Reason and Bradbury)

Deliverables

- Action research reports from each of six partners
- Case studies of Action Research studies, written by staff/zoo aquarium educator teams
- Research papers on professional development by staff
- Template for Be An Animal Scientist activity
- Research Tools
- Invitational Workshop
- Evaluation Report



People & Partners



Institutional Partners

- Aquarium of the Pacific
- Maryland Zoo
- New England Aquarium
- Phoenix Zoo
- St. Louis Zoo
- Woodland Park Zoo
- Char Associates

What does engagement look and sound like in a zoo or aquarium?

Impacts

- Increased capacity in the informal science education field to do action research, be reflective practitioners
- Institutional impact on zoos and aquariums

Challenges

- Time constraints on the part of zoo and aquarium educators – and action research requires a considerable time commitment.
- Need for a usable definition of “engagement” in zoos and aquariums (we’re working on it!)
- Definition of action research differs for people with different relationship to visitors.
- IRB issues, especially for zoos and aquaria without an IRB.

