

Action Research, T&L 569
7554 Thursdays 4:15-7:00
Spring Semester 2006
University of North Dakota
Department of Teaching & Learning

Instructor: Dr. Margaret Zidon

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Background:

Action Research is systematic, thoughtful inquiry focused on learning about one's (or another's) teaching practice for the purpose of continuously improving professional expertise. Unlike traditional education research modes where an outside "expert" diagnoses problems and prescribes remedies, action research is conducted from the "inside" by the teacher who develops a neutral stance and wider lens for self assessment and reflection on beliefs and practices imbedded in philosophical, historical, political-sociological foundations.

Conceptual Framework

The teacher education programs at the University of North Dakota are grounded in the progressive tradition. Three themes are woven throughout our programs: teacher as learner, teacher as active agent of learning and teacher as articulate visionary. The cornerstones of our programs facilitate the development of teachers **inspired to learn, to collaborate, to assess, and to reflect** on their role as professional educators through the intertwined processes of teaching and learning.

Objectives:

The Action Research course is designed to meet the following objectives:

- Develop an understanding, grounded in theory and the work of teaching, of the principles and practices of action research. (INTASC 2,3,4,5,7,8,9,10)
- Analyze action research articles and related readings and apply them to one's teaching and research practices. (INTASC 1,4,7,9 and others depending on project readings)
- Identify a problem, concern, or interest area for research. Design, implement, and evaluate an Action Research project. Also, provide a scholarly presentation of the Action Research project. (INTASC 1,2,6,7,8,9,10 and other INTASC principles depending on the focus of the project).
- Collaborate with other teachers in developing and critiquing action research.

Required Readings

Mertler, C. (2006). *Action Research: Teachers as researchers in the classroom*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Duckworth, E. (1987). Teacher as researcher. In “*The having of wonderful ideas*” and *other essays*. New York: Teachers College Press, pp. 122-140.

Perrone, V. (1991). Toward larger purposes. In *A letter to teachers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, pp. 1-11.

Examples of Action Research (Johnson; Zidon).

Various website articles indicated on course calendar.

Recommended Readings

Atwell, Nancy. (1987). *In the middle*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Barrentine, S., Ed. (1999). *Reading assessment: Principles and practices for elementary teachers*. Newark, DE, International Reading Association.

Calkins, L. (1994). *The art of teaching writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Campbell, L., Campbell, B., & Dickinson, D. (1999). *Teaching and learning through multiple intelligences*. (2nd edition). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Dickinson, T. & Butler, D. Reinventing the middle school. *Middle School Journal*, Sept. 2001.

Erb, T. (Ed.), (2001). *This we believe...and now we must act*. Westerville, OH: National Middle School Association.

Fountas, I.C. & Pinnell, G.S. (1996). *Guided reading: Good first teaching for all children*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Fountas, I.C. & Pinnell, G.S. (2001). *Guiding readers and writers grades 3-6*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Fletcher, R. (1998). *Craft lessons: Teaching writing K-12*. York, ME: Stenhouse.

Fulwiler, T., (Ed.), (1987). *The journal book*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Irvin, J. (Ed.), (2001). *What current research says to the middle level practitioner*. Westerville, OH: National Middle School Association.

Jackson, A. W. & Davis, G. A. (2000). *Turning points 2000: Educating adolescents in the 21st Century, A report of the Carnegie Corporation of New York*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Jensen, E. (1995). *Brain-based learning*. San Diego, CA: The Brain Store.

Jensen, E. (1998). *Teaching with the brain in mind*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Knowles, T. & Brown, D. (2000). *What every middle school teacher should know*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Recommended Web Sites: <http://ericir.syr.edu/Eric/> and <http://askeric.org/>

Evaluation Criteria:	Percentage of Grade (DRAFT)
Weekly assigned questions	10
In-class participation	14
Field Notes (6; one is an interview)	18
Literature Reviews (6)*	18
Plan for Action Research Project	10
Action Research Project Write-up	20
Action Research Project Presentation	5
Reflection Paper	5

A = 90-100%, B = 80-89%, C or less (don't go there!).

Description of Assignments:

Weekly Assigned Questions

It is important that you read the assignments thoroughly. Responding to the assigned questions (typed responses) will insure that you are ready to participate in each lesson.

In-Class Participation

Action research knowledge and application, critical thinking, improved communication skills, improved knowledge of your teaching area, and collegial exchanges of ideas and information are accomplished through preparation prior to class, listening and responding to others, articulating your ideas and thoughts, and a willingness to learn.

Field Notes (6)

Typed, double-spaced refined notes of classroom/field observations. One of these is an interview with another teacher. Further guidelines will be provided during class.

Literature Review. (6)

Typed, double-spaced summary of various literatures related to your topic.

Plan for Action Research Project

To be submitted February 23. The plan will include background, purpose of study, literature related to study (at least 3 resources), research design and methods. Further guidelines will be provided during class.

Write-up of Action Research Project

Due April 27. You have several exemplars for what is expected. We will go over, several times, expectations for this "capstone" assignment.

Presentation of Action Research Project

On April 27, you will present your action research project to 4 or 5 of your peers during class. Further guidelines will be provided.

Reflection Paper

On May 4, you are to submit a reflection paper that encompasses your choice of research topic, the processes you followed (field notes, literature reviews, research design and methods, data collection and analysis) along with reflective, evaluative comments on each of these. Comment on your findings, whether you think that they are valid and reliable or credible. Also comment on the action plan that you constructed and the direction that you see yourself going with further time. Further guidelines will be provided for this assignment.

Some Comments Before We Start:

Graduate work requires more work and time than undergraduate work. If it were easy to acquire a master's degree, more people would continue their education. I say this to let you know that you will be expected to dedicate several hours of hard work and good thinking to this course *throughout* the semester. I realize that many of you are in your first year of teaching while simultaneously working on a master's degree. I recognize this situation, but you can be assured that I will require of you what you need to learn about classroom research.

Here are a few other expectations. I want you to:

- provide me with your best work at all times
- submit written work that includes good writing conventions
- be prepared for in-class participation by having done your reading and assignments
- phone me in advance if you are unable to attend class or as soon as possible afterwards. I frown on absences and tardiness.
- ask me, if you do miss class, what you missed (not *if we did anything*)
- use APA writing style on all written work, unless I say otherwise
- **not** wear caps
- listen carefully and respectfully to others' opinions
- have a "buddy" to check with on assignments, directions, handouts, etc.; however, please check with me if either of you is unsure about expectations.

The following calendar is subject to change as need be. I will announce any changes at the beginning of each class.

Calendar for Action Research

Date	Topic and Activities	Assignments: Due Date Indicated in this Table
Jan. 12	Introductions Overview of Action Research Organization of Action Research text Organization of the course	
Jan. 19	Introduction to Action Research	Read pages xv-xx and Chapter 1 of Mertler. Answer assigned questions (provided Jan. 10). Print out and Read Rory O’ Brien handout, p. 18 Look at Madison website, pp.17-18
Jan. 26	Overview of Action Research Process <i>“Living with ambiguity is a virtue.”</i> IRB Presentation	Answer Q1, p. 19, Qs 3, 4 (p. 33). Read Duckworth: Teacher as researcher. Print out and read “An introduction to action research” – Buffalo State, p. 32.
Feb. 2	NO CLASS	
Feb. 9	Planning for Action Research Literature Review: CFL resource person Identifying a research topic. Writing a literature review – guidelines.	Read Chapter 3 Study pages 45-47; be ready for a quiz on ERIC system. Print out and read: ”Research practice guidelines for planning action research projects” p. 56 (N. & G. Pakak).

Feb. 16	Writing a literature review	Re-read Chapter 3 Read and review 3 articles related to research topic. See Qs 1, 4, 5. (Do all). Read Kim Johnson's paper up through literature review.
Feb. 23	Developing a research plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualitative/quantitative • Informed consent 	Submit Plan for Action Research Project. Read Chapter 4 Print out and read "Guidelines for developing a question" (p. 88). Qs 1,2,3,5,6 (p. 90). Quiz on terms.
Mar. 2	Collecting data Interviewing	Fieldnotes (2) Terms Quiz (3 types of interviews, terms on pp. 101, 103,105, validity, reliability, correlation, dependent variable(s), independent variable(s).
Mar. 9	Data collection – cont'd	
Mar. 16	No Class – Spring Break	
Mar. 23	Data Collection Data Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualitative – codes, categories, themes • Quantitative – descriptive statistics, inferential statistics Figures, Tables	Answer Qs 1, 2 Look at Qs 3, 4 (we'll do these in class, together)
Mar. 30	Developing an Action Plan	Read Chapter 7 Print out and read "Action research: A strategy for instructional improvement" (p. 171).

Apr. 6	Sharing & Reflecting	Read Chapter 8 Become familiar with presentation guidelines on P. 176
Apr. 13	Writing it up	Read Chapter 9 First Draft ready for peer review; Bring 2 copies. Turn in one of the 2 copies. Sign up for presentation.
Apr. 20	Writing it up – cont'd	
Apr. 27	Presentation Night	Submit 2 items: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • outline of presentation • action research paper
May 4	Reflection and Evaluation	Last Class Submit Reflection Paper

Action Research Final Paper:

An “A” Paper (22-25 points) includes all the components of a research paper (introduction with adequate background information, statement of the problem, intentional and focused literature review, statement of purpose for research with research questions, intervention plan and research methods that include research data and analysis). This preliminary work was reviewed several times throughout the course so will not constitute the bulk of the grade for the final paper. The Findings section will include an outline of themes/patterns and a write up of at least one of the major themes/patterns. Qualitative evidence through field notes, interviews, student scores, etc. should be integrated throughout the findings as an aspect of both triangulation and “proof” or believability. Quantitative evidence (if applicable), typically in the form of descriptive statistics, should be provided both within the text of the paper and should be visually represented through the use of tables and/or graphs. The Conclusions section shows that the research questions are answered and that there is a sense of larger purpose to the research than the mechanics of instruction or research methods. The Future Action section shows that the teacher-researcher acknowledges the ongoing aspects of his or her work through statements sustaining some aspects and improving others. There is a sense of commitment to students’ learning. APA is adhered to in the References paper and throughout the paper.

A “B” Paper (19-21.9 points) has all the same sections as the A paper. In the Findings section, the teacher-researcher has provided “evidence” of findings most of the time, but has missed opportunities to either use a piece of evidence or has not shown how various data led to further teaching/research decisions. In the Conclusions section the teacher-researcher answers the research questions but it is not always clear to the reader what sense the teacher-researcher has made. The Future Action section is mostly clear, but may not provide a sense of continued and important action. APA is adhered to in the References page and throughout the paper, with only a few errors.

A “C Paper (16-18.9 points) has all the required sections as the A paper. In the Findings, there is little evidence of use of data to demonstrate “evidence” and there is little demonstration, if any, of explaining how data was used to make teaching/research decisions. In the Conclusions section, the teacher-researcher fails to answer all the research questions and it is not evident that there is consideration of any wider meaning. The Future Action section may include a listing of things, but it makes little sense to the reader how these action steps grew out of the findings. APA is not adhered to in a systematic manner in either or both of the References page and throughout the paper; there are numerous errors.

A “D” Paper (13-15.9) points demonstrates a level of incompleteness in all aspects.