

Guidelines for the Action Research Project For the Master's Degree

**Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education
San José State University**

Introduction to the Action Research Project

Change happens in schools when educators engage in data-driven decision making and the school community asks significant questions about the performance of students. The purpose of the Master's Degree Action Research Project is to improve student learning. You will design and implement an intervention to solve an important issue over which you have influence.

To earn your M. A. in Educational Administration and Supervision and meet the Graduate School requirements for Plan B, you will engage in a Cycle of Inquiry, using Habits of Mind, and complete an Action Research project. This Action Research Project will demonstrate your ability:

- to identify an important school/district problem,
- critically analyze the status quo,
- ask essential research questions that get at the heart of the issue,
- research potential solutions from the literature,
- design and implement an intervention,
- study the results, and
- make recommendations for future action in a scholarly, systematic and professional manner.

You will develop these skills in Ed Ad 200, 201, more fully in Ed Ad 202, and in all other Educational Leadership courses.

Separate sections of the Action Research Project are considered to be in draft form and need to be revisited and revised as you become more informed regarding the focus of your study during the two years of your program.

Writing a Master's Action Research Project requires continuous work under the supervision of your professors. Please read the guidelines thoroughly and frequently so that you will clearly understand the expectations of the Educational Leadership faculty for the award of the M.A. degree.

Before you begin writing, think about the comprehensive logic of a Master's Action Research Project. Since it is a research project, it really revolves around asking and answering questions. (See the following *Format for the Action Research Project: 15 Parts.*) In the Action Research Project, you introduce your research problem with

background, problem and purpose statements, and research questions. Then you look at what current research suggests (what have researchers written about the area you are studying) and make appropriate revisions to your intervention to solve the problem. Determine what data you need to collect and analyze. Finally recommendations regarding the project and an evaluation of the Action Research process for you and your workplace must be discussed. The expectation is that you will share your Master's Action Research Project with other educators.

Effective Writing

Before you sit down at your computer, think about what hard work formal writing really is. Logical progression of thought, smooth transitions between ideas, use of the active voice, and avoidance of bureaucratic cliché and educational jargon all help you express your ideas more clearly and forcefully. Compose your drafts on a computer and double space between lines for easy reading and to meet APA requirements. Make this formal report concise and readable. The required format is Times Roman or similar and 12 point font size. The finished product will be approximately 40 pages in length, plus references and appendices. Always use spell check and then proof read before you submit each draft to your professor. Always have a colleague proofread your work. Always print an extra copy for your records.

The Action Research Project is a formal, scholarly report, which requires past tense and third person consistently through the entire report except for those concepts which are considered timeless, e.g.: The school is located on Main Street. Do not use slang, contractions, abbreviations, acronyms, biased terms, or gender inequity terms. Give specific examples instead of using *etc.*

With this in mind, “in this study, the data indicated that at this time and under these circumstances” and “the researcher uncovered” are more appropriate remarks. Keep the reader in mind, not yourself. Help the reader understand what you are presenting.

FORMAT FOR THE ACTION RESEARCH PROBLEM: 15 PARTS

1. Cover sheet: see Appendix A for a sample.

2. Table of contents: a simple table of contents matching the elements of the 15 parts of the Action Research Project will appear after the abstract.

Note: Each page must be numbered.

3. Background to the Problem.

This part is divided into two sections: Background and Setting.

The first part, **Background**, should be three to five pages:

- Introduce your problem in global terms in the first two paragraphs. Answer the question, “What is the significance of your study?”
- Present the larger related issues at the national or state level.
- Define how this affects education in general.
- Relate the larger issues to the more specific problem in your Action Research Project.
- Relate the significance of your Action Research Project to your school or district.

The second part, **Setting**: the school or demographic profile. It contains:

- relevant information about school and/or district: e. g.: size, disaggregated academic achievement, ethnic breakdown, English language learners, gender, parent participation, teachers with M. A. degrees or emergency credentials, experience levels and professional development of teachers;
- recent school conditions;
- current interventions and effectiveness;
- current context of school.

By the time you complete the background statement, your reader should be ready for the very brief problem statement as the logical conclusion of this section.

4. Statement of problem: “The problem was that....”

This is the hardest part of the Master’s Degree Action Research Project. Your clarity in stating the problem will drive the rest of your work. Only one or two sentences are required here.

5. Purpose of the Study: Intervention

Describe your intervention. Then complete the statement “The purpose of the study was to...” Labor over this section because a clear statement of the intervention and the purpose of the study is the very foundation for the rest of your paper. Link your purpose and your intervention directly to your problem. Only one or two sentences are required here. See Appendix C for examples of Problem and Purpose Statements.

6. Research Questions

Research questions are based on factors that the researcher thinks influence or will solve the stated problem. The keys to good research questions are answering who, what, when, where, and how (not why).

Generally you need from three to five research questions. Each research question requires an instrument and a source of data. One or more of the research questions might be answered by previous research in the search of the literature (Annotated Bibliography).

Each research question must be answered with a matching heading in the section entitled *Research Findings*. The Research Questions need to be revisited and revised frequently as you become more informed during your study.

7. Review of Literature

The review of literature should contain a balanced list of significant seminal sources such as books, refereed journal articles, and a limited number of reliable Internet resources. The sources should be guided by the Problem Statement and Research Questions.

The Review of Literature has two parts: the Annotated Bibliography and the General Summary.

Annotated Bibliography

Each of required citations (15 for individuals, 20-30 for teams, depending on the number of people on the team) in the Annotated Bibliography consists of four parts:

- For each citation use the formal American Psychological Association. (2001). *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. (5th edition).
- Summary: the key points of the author(s),
- Strengths and Weakness of the book or article which might include the validity of the research methodology, and
- Contributions to the identified problem in your research study.

Place the annotated bibliographies in alphabetical order by the last name of the first author. Print them in continuous form.

Summary

Following the annotated bibliographies, write a two page narrative that summarizes the relevance of your literature search to your problem. Use correct APA formatting (5th edition) for all references.

See Appendix B for sample annotated bibliographies.

8. Methodology

The Methodology clearly defines the intervention and the specific participants in the study. Describe in detail sources of data that you employed, methods of gathering data, data-gathering instruments, and procedures you used to analyze data.

- a. Instrumentation: describe sources of data used in detail.
(surveys, interviews, tests, CBEDS, cumulative folders)
- b. Data collection procedures: describe how you collected the data using each instrument.
- c. Data analysis: describe what you did to analyze the data.
(comparing pre-intervention and post-intervention scores; comparing this year's average to last year's average, mean scores or individual scores; comparing one type of score to another; frequency of specific responses; patterns of positive responses).
- d. Organization of data analysis: charts, graphs, tables.

You can organize this section by first writing a list of everything you will do in your research. Be very specific. For example, if you develop a survey, include a description of how you developed it, who you had review it as an expert panel, who piloted it, how you administered it and to whom, how you guaranteed a maximum return rate, and what you did with the data. Place the survey itself in the appendix.

This section on Methodology is updated over and over again until the last draft of the Action Research Project is approved by the professor.

Always use past tense in your final report although when you first write it, everything will be in the future.

9. Research Findings

This is the major part of your report. The narrative should be about ten pages in length. Report your research findings by restating and answering each of your research questions. Present your findings in great detail since this is the very heart of your Action Research Project in which you describe how effective your planned intervention was. Clarify your findings through tables, diagrams, graphs, and figures. Help the reader by numbering, entitling, and explaining tables and figures. All charts, graphs, and tables will be numbered sequentially.

10. Conclusion

Interpret your findings without repeating them. Read into the facts. Dig under them. Speculate about the meaning of the facts. Tell the reader what the facts really mean. Help the reader understand what is most important in your investigation and how it relates to student learning. The key idea here is subjective judgment based upon factual

information, not opinion drawn only from your feelings. State your conclusions in relationship to your research questions. This discussion is the *capstone* of your formal report.

11. Recommendations

This part of the Action Research project is fun because most of us like to tell other people what they ought to do. From your findings and conclusions, you should be able to make recommendations that might help someone else improve student learning. Recommend action to educators, the board of trustees, the superintendent, or your school principal. Describe how they might improve the district, school, or classroom based on your study. Recommendations can include suggestions for future research studies or how to continue this study next year. Include at least three or four ideas in this discussion. If Research Findings were not conclusive, the recommendations should include what one still needs to do to make the findings more conclusive.

12. Evaluation of this Process for You and Your Workplace

Here is the opportunity to discuss and evaluate this action research process for you and your workplace. What difference has this process made in the quality of learning and life in your school or district? What would you do differently if you could start this project again? What impact has your engagement in this cycle of inquiry had on student learning? Have procedures or processes for teaching and learning changed? Reflect on your own key learnings and/or those of your team.

13. References

Follow the APA Publication Manual (5th edition) format carefully. All sources, including the entries in the Annotated Bibliography, cited within the Master's Action Research Project should be referenced in this section.

14. Appendices

The appendices are the last section of the Master's Action Research Project. All appendices should be referred to in the appropriate location in the text of your paper. Appendices are listed alphabetically: Appendix A, Appendix B....

15. Abstract

The abstract is the last part of the paper that you write. This is the concise narrative or executive summary of your Action Research Project. In narrative form, describe your problem, state the purpose of your study, list research questions, sketch the methodology, and report major findings and recommendations in one page. Place the abstract after the title page.

Components of the Master's Degree Action Research Project Plan B (This can serve as a table of contents for your paper.)

1. Title page*
2. Abstract**
3. Table of contents**
4. Background to the problem*
5. Problem statement*
6. Purpose statement*
7. Research questions*
8. Review of literature*
9. Methodology*
10. Research findings**
11. Conclusions**
12. Recommendations**
13. Evaluation of this process for you and your workplace**
14. References**
15. Appendices**

*Required in Ed Ad 202 or Ed Ad 221.

** Completed in Ed Ad 253.

Suggested Readings

- American Psychological Association. (2001). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association*. (5th edition). Washington, DC: Author.
- Calhoun, E. (1994). *How to use research in the self-renewing school*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Cox, J. (1996). *Your opinion, please! How to build the best questionnaires in the field of education*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Greenwood, D. & Levin, M. *Introduction to action research: Social research for social change*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Isaacs, S. & Michael, W. (1997). *Handbook in research and evaluation*. San Diego, CA: Educational and Industrial Testing.
- Miles, G. (2000). *Action research: A guide for the teacher researcher*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Sagor, R. (1992). *How to conduct collaborative action research*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Teresa M. Morris, Librarian – Martin Luther King, Jr. Library can assist you in your research.

Email: Teresa.Morris@sjsu.edu

Voice: 408.808.2097

<http://www.sjlibrary.org>

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE TITLE PAGE

THE RESULTS OF IMPLEMENTING ACCELERATED READING

AT

HOPE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

A Research Paper

Presented

To

The Faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership

College of Education

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

Focus: Administration and Supervision

Plan B

Student Name

April 2007

APPENDIX B SAMPLE ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES

Berkowitz, A.R., Desmarais, K.H., Hogan, K., & Moorcroft, T.A. (2000). Authentic assessment in the informal setting: How it can work for you. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 31 (3), 20-24.

Summary

This article reviews several classroom techniques and uses examples that show the use of authentic assessment at an ecology education center. The authors examine the following techniques: portfolio assessment, essay and scaffolded essay assessment, and performance assessment. These assessment tools are used to have students explore their understanding and application of knowledge. Learning objectives, developing a scoring system, administering assessments, scoring and analyzing data are things to consider when designing an assessment.

Strengths and Weaknesses

This article suggests several good ways to use assessment in an informal educational setting. It gives examples of how many programs already have students record in a journal and how that can be used like a portfolio. It also suggests ways to administer the assessment. The article is honest about the time and money it takes to develop and implement an assessment program, but it also conveys the excitement and improvement that assessments bring a program.

Contributions

This article was shared with the staff at Walden West Outdoor School. This article is very clear on how to use assessment techniques in an outdoor setting. By

reading the assessment necessities, the staff had a better idea where to start designing the assessment.

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

Summary

This work clearly addresses the essentials of writing and suggests structures to use in establishing a writing workshop. Calkin poses questions most frequently asked by educators and cites chapters and/or specific pages to read that will address or answer those questions.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Calkin's book is clearly written and describes the art of teaching writing very concisely. It is very easy to find answers to specific questions or concerns by using her reference guide. The only weakness is the sheer length of the book.

Contributions

The chapters on conferencing and author's chair to support literacy chats were used with colleagues. The structure of writing workshop as exemplified in her book assisted in setting up the classroom workshop routines.

Curwin, R. L., & Mender, A. N. (1997). *As tough as necessary: Countering violence, aggression, and hostility in our schools*. Retrieved February 27, 2002, from www.ascd.org/readingroom/books/curwin97book.html

Summary

This article serves as a guide for teachers in the classroom, focusing on how to develop rapport with students so that they feel safe, secure and heard. It discusses how to establish core values: respect, trust, responsibility, and empathy towards others. The

article also discusses conflict resolution and practicing diffusing skills to avoid power struggles.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Curwin and Mendler are very thorough and cover many components that determine the success of keeping a school campus free of violence. The segment on teaching with boundaries and using methods of developing class rules so that everyone buys into them and shares ownership for creating them was especially good. This is mostly done through a democratic process, where youth serve as the monitors for class behavior. The methods of defining class rules take time and follow specific steps. The teacher can veto the rule if it falls into any one of the following categories: it violates school-wide policies, it does not match one of the teacher's important values, or it interferes with the learning process. Students vote on the rules before they are adopted.

Contributions

Even though this article focused on a violence free classroom, it shared common themes for safety on campus, such as: use of lights, weapon and drug searches, installing closed circuit cameras, safe ingress and egress to and from school, removal of overgrown shrubbery around windows and high traffic areas, having a campus resource officer and lastly, creating and practicing the school crisis response plans. The authors outline a school violence action plan that uses the same format as the S.E.M.S. and they encourage involvement from not only law enforcement, but also parents and students, in formulating an action plan against school violence.

Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (1998). *Understanding by design*. Alexandria, VA:
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Summary

This book discusses proper questioning techniques in order to create a better learning environment. The authors state the difference between surface learning and that, which is meaningful. The authors force in-depth questions backed up with good arguments and conclusions to support the answers. The authors also point out the differences between different questioning approaches and the developmental process involved to move from naïve to sophisticated understanding. Interwoven into the book are the guidelines explaining how to create sound assessments in order to gather pertinent and non-superfluous data based on questioning techniques.

Strengths and Weaknesses

This book is comprehensive and very focused upon the topic of creating true understanding. The authors take the reader through a well-developed, systematic and thought-provoking blueprint describing how to form meaningful questions in order to help facilitate deeper understanding.

Contributions

This book helped give greater depth to the questions asked in order to determine staff needs and progress. Teachers were interviewed using the questioning techniques outlined in the book so that the researcher could gather only the most pertinent data in the short amount of time allotted. Though the book focuses primarily on student learning, it was an easy jump to broaden the scope and use it for this research. The model presented in this book was also used to design the program for both students and teachers. It was

agreed that teachers' workshops should not be centered on learning isolated skills but instead be centered on learning skills in relationship to where technology would best fit within their curriculum. Computer literacy for students would also be taught in the same manner thus providing a richer experience for all.

APPENDIX C

PROBLEM AND PURPOSE STATEMENTS

THE PROBLEM STATEMENT ADDRESSES A BASIC DIFFICULTY, AREA OF CONCERN, OR A FELT NEED. Your problem statement should be able to answer the question: “What is your study about?”

THE PURPOSE STATEMENT EMPHASIZES THE PRACTICAL INTERVENTION OR OUTCOME, e.g., “The purpose of this study was to

Sample Problem and Purpose Statements:

PROBLEM STATEMENT: The problem was that the ninth grade writing scores at Deluxe High School have consistently dropped over the past five years.

PURPOSE STATEMENT: The purpose of this action research was to determine whether implementation of a pilot ninth grade writing program, Writing Challenge, would result in increased writing scores for the ninth graders at Deluxe High School.

PROBLEM STATEMENT: The problem was that student test scores at Caren Elementary drop at fourth and fifth grades in language arts.

PURPOSE STATEMENT: The purpose of this action research was to investigate whether a professional development program for teachers that includes collaboration and on-going assessments will result in improved language arts test scores for fourth and fifth grade students.

PROBLEM STATEMENT: The problem was that both test scores and student interviews showed that eighth grade students were not interested in studying history or social studies.

PURPOSE STATEMENT: The purpose of this action research was to determine whether implementation of a new social studies and history curriculum based on studying local community issues would result in improved student interest and motivation.

APPENDIX D

***IMPORTANT INFORMATION: HOW TO APPLY FOR YOUR M. A. DEGREE**

It is your responsibility, as a graduate student and a candidate for the M. A. degree, to complete the two forms required for the M. A. diploma and submitting them to the Graduate School, which awards the M. A. degree for the University. The first must be completed by October 1 for students who expect a degree to be awarded in May.

1. The ***Departmental Request for Candidacy*** form
This form lists all of your courses and must be signed by the departmental chair who turns it in to the Graduate School by October 1. In order to be eligible for candidacy for the M. A. degree, you must have completed 9 graded units by October 1. This form is distributed in the classes of all professors who teach Tier 1 second year courses, completed by each student, signed by the departmental chair, and submitted to Graduate Studies. You must list 30 units only on this form.
1. Graduate Studies will evaluate your application form, ***Departmental Request for Candidacy***. Graduate Studies will send you a letter in October, announcing whether or not you qualify as an M. A. candidate.

You must respond to this letter immediately by completing the form, ***Application for the Award of the M. A. Degree***, and faxing it immediately to Graduate Studies at 408-924-2777. Keep a copy of this very important document. This form will also be distributed in your fall semester classes or you can download it from www.sjsu.edu > Graduate Studies > forms.

It is your responsibility, as a student and M. A. candidate, to complete this form and turn it in to Graduate Studies. Print or type your name precisely because this will be printed on your diploma. The address you list is the address to which your diploma will be mailed after the graduation ceremony in May.

If you have not received a letter from Graduate Studies by December 1, admitting you to M. A. candidacy, call the departmental chair. You cannot graduate or receive your M. A. degree unless Graduate Studies has received and processed the form Departmental Request for Candidacy by October 1 AND the form Application for the Award of the M. A. Degree by February 1. It is each student's responsibility to complete the two forms and get them to Graduate Studies.

3. Incomplete Grades

A grade of Incomplete (I) can be awarded by the professor of a course for which the student has completed 80% of the work required and needs a short time to complete 100% of the work. An incomplete grade for any course is automatically converted by Admissions and Records to the grade of F one year after the semester for which the

student took the course. It is the student's responsibility to clear the Incomplete by handing in the additional 20% of the required work before the year expires. Professors have the option of the grade of F instead of an Incomplete if 80% of the work is not completed by the last day of the course.

Deadline dates for final approval of the Action Research Project for the Master's degree:

- e. By April 15 for May graduation
- f. By July 15 for August graduation
- g. By November 15 for December graduation

APPENDIX E ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: ABOUT TIER 2

1. Tier 2

When a person who holds a Preliminary Administrative Services credential is appointed to an administrative position, she or he has twelve (12) months in which to enroll in a Tier 2 program for the Professional Administrative Services credential. This is by regulation of the CCTC.

2. Tier 2 at SJSU

When a student graduates with the M. A. degree at SJSU, she or he is terminated from the system. The student must reapply for Tier 2 but does not have to pay the \$55 application fee again. Most of the required admissions documents can be transferred from the student's Tier 1 folder. Check the Educational Leadership website for complete admissions requirements for Tier 2 at www.coe.edu/edad

Tier 2 at SJSU consists of nine monthly seminars, which meet on designated Saturdays during the one-year program. Peer Coaching, district mentoring, advanced field work, a change matrix, and an exit portfolio of competency are required in Tier 2.