FOUNDATIONS OF ACTION RESEARCH
MSSE 505 Syllabus

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Introduction and Course Goals
Welcome to MSSE 505 Designing Action Research. Action research (AR) is semi-formal research designed and implemented by K-12 or college teachers to learn more about teaching issues of concern to them. In general, each teacher researcher (TR) works with a team of other TR’s who are investigating related problems. Teams are often guided by a facilitator, who may be one of the TR’s or an outsider with expertise in the problem being studied. Although action research involves data gathering in schools, often in the teachers’ or professors’ own classrooms, it also includes a "study group" aspect. Members of each AR team share readings, research strategies, and findings with one another. Members pool their experience as they design and implement studies, and as they translate research results into concrete changes in their own classrooms. Members form a support community for conducting research and for taking appropriate action to improve their students’ learning. Unfortunately, the term "research" conjures up images of inactivity, "Let’s not do anything about the problem, let’s just study it." The strength of action research is the insistence that research and action are inseparable -- both are essential to good teaching and they make sense best when they happen together.
The course will be divided into five major segments:

* **Weeks 1 - 3** - Introduction to action research and identification of issues of interest to course participants for research design projects. Read sample AR studies by K-college teachers. Begin review of prior research pertaining to your focus question (this will be submitted with Special Assignment #6 {SA#6}, your final AR proposal).
* **Weeks 4 - 5** - Monitoring present programs vs. implementing a new "treatment" - Most AR always involve implementing, then evaluating, a new approach, or you can evaluate a current program with the philosophy "if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it"? What are key issues to resolve (e.g. unit of study, sampling), once you decide which of these two routes to follow?
* **Weeks 6 - 7** - Introduce data gathering and analysis techniques and practice these by gathering observation and interview data in a school setting. (Note: we will keep adding to our data collection/analysis repertoires in #509 next fall).
* **Weeks 8 - 9** - What studies have already been done in your area of interest? A review of the literature will reveal this, plus the review might reveal some methodology and research design that might be useful to you.
* **Weeks 10 - 12** - Prepare final proposals including a research plan and a plan for ensuring that the results lead to changes in the classroom. Submit final proposal on Monday, April 17.

Assignments and Grading: Your assignments include (a) doing the course readings at the start of each week, (b) participation 3-4 times per week (the earlier the better) in a discussion folder, and (c) completing six Special Assignments (SA’s). The sixth and final SA will be the action research
proposal due on April 17. Please complete the readings early so that you can jump into the week’s discussion. Each assignment is due on the date posted, and the discussion rubric is due by Wed. for the preceding week. If emergencies develop (and these should be limited) in keeping with these deadlines, you must notify the instructors or points may be deducted from your grade.

Course grades will be based upon:

- Special Assignments 1 - 5 (10 pts. each) 50 possible pts.
- Special Assignment 6 (final AR proposal) 20
- Weekly discussion participation for 12 weeks (submitting discussion rubric) 36
- Discussion leader or co-leader for one group for 1 week, and completion of any course evaluations 6

112 possible pts.

Grades will be assigned using the standard rule-of-thumb that those earning 90 - 100% of course points receive an A- to A+, scores of 80 - 89% are equivalent to a B- to B+, and so forth. Any variation from this guideline will be in the student’s favor.

Late Work - We realize that there are a number of events in your lives that will make it difficult to reach the assigned deadlines. If you anticipate a late assignment please let us know in advance and together we will work out a new due date. Unless there are special circumstances this is usually a 10% grade deduction and this would increase depending on how late the work is. Just as you ask your students to work with you regarding special problems, we are asking the same consideration.

MSU Policy on Incomplete Grades

MSU's policy on incompletes is that you must have completed 75% of the coursework in order to receive an "I" grade in a course. If you meet this condition, and have instructor approval, the "I" grade allows you to make the missing work up by the end of the next term you are registered. Note that in EDCI 505 coursework includes both the 6 Special Assignments and active weekly discussion involvement.

In general, we discourage students from taking an incomplete. However, we will review requests when circumstances (serious illness, family crisis) prevent course completion.

Maintaining Intellectual Integrity (Plagiarism)

Paraphrasing or quoting another’s work without citing the source is a form of academic misconduct. Even inadvertent or unintentional misuse or appropriation of another's work (such as relying heavily on source material that is not expressly acknowledged) is considered plagiarism. All sources of information that are not your original thoughts need to be cited. This includes, but is not limited to, journal articles, textbooks and online resources. Adapted from MSU Syllabus language page: http://www.montana.edu/teachlearn/TLResources/SyllabusLanguage.html

Course Texts: There are two primary course texts.

The full titles of the texts are given below.

- Action Research: Improving Schools and Empowering Educators (5th edition) - Mertler - Sage 978-1483389059
- The Basics of Data Literacy - Bowen/Bartley NSTA Press 9781938946035 (e-book 9781938946769)

Articles, chapters, other resources, and sample AR projects will be posted on our Distance to Learn web site (D2L).

Some additional AR titles, for those of you wishing to "dig deeper" (over the next year) are:
Calhoun, E., (1994)
*How to use Action Research in the Self-renewing School*
ASCD (www.ascd.org)

Cochran-Smith, Marilyn and Susan Lytle (1993)
*Inside/Outside: Teacher Research and Knowledge*
New York: Teachers College Press

Greenwood, Davydd J. & Morten Levin
*Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change*

Hendricks, C. *Improving Schools Through Action Research.*
Pearson.

*The Art of Classroom Inquiry*
Heinemann, NH.

Kincheloe, Joe. L. (1991)
*Teachers As Researchers: Qualitative Inquiry As A Path to Empowerment*
London: Falmer Press

McNiff and Whitehead (2010)
*You and Your Action Research Project*
Routledge, NY.

McTaggart, R. (1997)
*Participatory Action Research*
State University Press, Albany.

Mills, G (2014)
*Action Research: A guide for the Teacher Researcher*
Pearson Press

O’Hanlon, Christine (1996)

*Handbook of Action Research*
Sage Publication, CA.

Sagor, R. (2005)
*The Action Research Guidebook*
Corwin Press, CA.
Sagor, Richard (1993)  
How to Conduct Collaborative Action Research  
ASCD-www.ascd.org

Action Research, Second Edition  

Tuckman, B. (1999)  
Conducting Educational Research  
Harcourt Brace, NY.

Schedule and Assignments

Jan 15-21
Log on, find out which group you are in. Complete the bio of yourself.
Readings - Sagor - "Problem Formation" (In Resource area of Content)

Jan 22 - 28
Readings - Mertler - Chapter 1
Assignment 1 - Problem Formation assignment due Jan 29.

Jan 29 - Feb. 4
Reading - Any MSSE capstone project of your choice

Feb. 5 - 11
Reading - Mertler - Appendix A, B & C.
Assignment # 2 - Analysis of an AR Project due on Feb. 12.

Feb. 12 - 18
Reading - Mertler - Ethics in research - pp. 108-115; Ethics in Writing - pp. 245-246; Working on IRB certificate

Feb. 19 - Feb. 25
Reading - Mertler - Chapter 2

Feb. 26 - March 4
Reading - Mertler - Chapter 5

March 5 - 11
Reading - Data Analysis Book - Section 1 - Chapters 1 - 3
Assignment # 4 - Data collection and analysis due on March 12
March 12 - 18
MSU spring break so we won't have any readings or discussions. If your spring break doesn't align with this time period, please work with the instructor.

Assignment #5 deals with a literature review, and you may wish to begin planning a time that you might access a library. Sometimes spring breaks are good times to check out the library.

March 19 - 25
Reading - Data Analysis Book - Section 1 - Chapters 4-7.

March 26 - April 1
Sharing of literature review resources.
Reading - Mertler - Chapter 3
Sharing of valuable resources for final proposal

April 2 - 8
Readings - Mertler - Chapter 4
Assignment #5 - Literature Review assignment due on April 9

April 9-15
Sharing of valuable resources for final proposal
Reading - Data Analysis book - Appendices I - VI (pp. 91-135) (You'll want to save both books as they will be our textbooks in 509).
Final Assignment #6 - Research proposal due on April 23