



Course Syllabus

Edu 5800/SpEd 5800 01	Dr. Jeri Levesque levesqjr@webster.edu	
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Applied Research	Spring 2003	03
COURSE TITLE	TERM	CREDIT HOURS
WEGG WEBH 403		
SITE		

1. Course Description: (provide details of student focus, rationale, scope, and prerequisites)

The purpose of this course is to encourage critical inquiry and collaboration among practitioners, administrators, researchers and other professionals through action research. Action research is a component of reflective practice and professional learning grounded on an ethical commitment to improving practice and actualizing educational values.

Students are oriented to action research as a natural component of professional development and reflective practice. Students explore action research methodology through applications to self identified professional challenges and questions. Students learn to manipulate scholarly tools such as , Internet search engines, participant observation, data analysis, grant writing and public dissemination of findings.

Students are encouraged to demonstrate curiosity by examining something *intriguing* in his or her practice. Students acquire the spiraling tenets of action research; action, observation and reflection. Students design and conduct action research projects to better understand and improve teacher behaviors, learning outcomes, school improvement, curriculum, professional practice and the democratic principles of education.

1. Learning Outcomes: (goals, objectives, course outcomes, etc.) Identify any MOSTEP or professional standards that are met by each learning outcome.

Goals:

Students will develop the motives and skills necessary to make daily practice more professional. They will conduct action research strengthen reflective practices and serve as change agents in educational communities.

Objectives:

- Engage in critical reflection to change and improve various aspects of practice, one's understanding of practice, and the place where one practices.
- Clarify ethical commitments to professional practice within a framework of democratic principles.
- Design and conduct a research cycle of acting, observing, and reflecting.
- Develop new perspectives of the relationship between theory and practice in educational settings by placing action research and organizational renewal in an interdependent context.
- Document and disseminate the research cycle by writing an account of the action research experience.

1. Schedule of required readings, class preparations and assignments, lectures, discussions, student presentations, out-of-class assignments and exams.

The Missouri Show-Me Standards are addressed within the content of this course. Identification of specific standards are included within course assignments. Integration of Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) standards and grade levels will be integrated into this course when appropriate.

SCHEDULE of required readings, class preparations, and assignments, learning experiences, discussions, student presentations, and exams:

Calendar of Class Meetings

January	February	March	April	May
15 22 29	5 12 26	4 25	1 22	6

Unit One: Orientations to Ways of Knowing and Action Research

Rationale: The first quarter of class (January to mid February) is devoted to self-focus, introspection and critical reflection while concurrently becoming familiar with the scholarly tools of action research. Students engage in conversations, open discussions and debate on-line with the course instructor to make explicit personal theories about ethical concerns, practical challenges, barriers to effective practice, professional opportunities, systems change and career development. Students organize their thinking in preparation for action research efforts to make sense of and improve their practice.

Orientation Class (Jan 15)

What is action research?

An Epistemological* Foundation for Action Research

*epistemology: The branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge, in particular its foundations, scope, and validity.

Learning Tasks Use a general systems theory to explain your job as an educator. Include in your brief written description how these systems support or limit your philosophy of teaching. Identify at least two real-life problems that confound your practice. Target one point where you have the power to make changes. Standing on Dewey's shoulders to survey your professional landscape, forecast the actions needed to change your professional life for the better.

Choose one "friendly outsider" classmate to share an email draft for critical friends conversation. Bring your copy and a copy of the reply to the next class (1/22)).

Discussion Forum Student introductions – Who are you? What do you know best about your profession? What is your greatest professional passion? What do you wonder? What wonderful ideas do you have about your profession? Where could action research fit and improve your practice?

Write: A 500 word essay about something in your current practice that needs serious study, change, and improvement. Prepare a five minute presentation about where you are and where you'd like to be by May regarding action research and your practice.

Read: Mills (text) Appendix A – Action Research in Action: A Case Study of Curtis Elementary School and an Article Critique

Prepare for class discussion next week.

Conducting Reflective Practice (Jan 21, 27)

Topic for Discussion: Teaching as a scholarly activity

Read: Mills, G. (text) Chapter I: Understanding Action Research. Establish an Action Research folder on your hard drive. Begin an electronic professional journal.

Read: Chapter 7: Sharing, Critiquing, and Celebrating Action Research On-Line

Read and Think: The Brown University LAB Action Research Handbook (online or the paper copy shared in class on January 22).

Consider: In what ways is your reflective journal connected to what you know about your profession concerning technical, practical, and critical orientations?

Read and conduct, Levesque's SERP (Self-Evaluation of Reflective Practice).

Reflect in professional log about insights, questions, and findings generated by the SERP. Share a selection with a friendly outsider (swap during class on the 27th). Respond with suggestions to pursue opportunities for action research.

Download and read **any** full text document that links to your first week essay about opportunities to study and change an aspect of your practice. *Students will receive a guide to Action Research Internet Resources during class on January 21.* Reflect in your journal as you consider opportunities for action research in your practice.

Observe: During the seven nights between classes, observe the moon at least 5 times. Write a five minute reflection describing your experiences for three of the 5 observations.

Reflect: Try to identify gaps between espoused theories about best practices, personal philosophy of practice and the behaviors observed. What can you learn about yourself that will promote your professional development?

Unit Two: Developing Inquiring Minds

Focus: Posing Key Research Questions

Feb 5

Rationale: At this phase of the course, students are directed to focus on an opportunity for change in their practice or understanding of practice that is within their realms of reality and control. Effort is centered on documenting base line practices and targeting intervention strategies designed to answer research questions and/or solve problems in real-life.

Class Critique Sorting through the garbage to find the jewels: Knowing good research from bad. Students will critique an article during class.

Read: Mills, Section 4. See page 82. Using a large piece of poster board, newsprint etc

Construct: a chart answering the six key questions. Post your chart next to your research station/computer. Reflect on this chart at least three times – revise as necessary – post final response to instructor. Bring to class (Feb 5) for a Poster Session.

Read: Chapter 8. Choose a focus strategy described in the text. Focus and reflect in your professional log.

Search: Conduct an Internet search from the Emerson Library web site (you'll need your student ID#). Expand the search to other resources. Students are encouraged spend at least one hour per week searching for resources that increase professional knowledge about the topic of the action research project. Students should save PDF and Word file in an electronic folder on their home computers. It's recommended that only those files of primary interest be printed and reviewed for the Literature Review.

Post: Your research question. Reflect on feedback from the class and instructor.

Read: Chapter 2 Deciding on an Area of Focus

Practice: Log interesting thoughts, questions, musings etc. Share your favorite with the class.

Construct: A Structured Learning Continuum and an Action Research Continuum

Focus: Complete the following statement, " The purpose of my action research study is to..." Email the statement to Dr. Levesque & Ms. Northcott.

Reading and Reflecting on Professional Literature

Feb 12

Notice: Class will meet at the Emerson Library at 5 o'clock. Students will spend the first 90 minutes conducting independent study to locate pertinent resources. Students are directed to find one resource that presents a theory, one that describes a classroom practice, and one that is a research study about the topic of the action research. During the remaining time students will convene and focus on strategies for reviewing professional literature. A handout will be shared.

What to Look for and How to Find It

- Hard copy journals in university libraries

- Full text on-line journals
- Internet Libraries
- Serendipitous Search Engine Findings

Read: Reading and Reviewing Research (Levesque).

Search: Choose a topic of personal professional relevance. Visit the university library. Review catalog of local holdings. Read at least three intriguing articles (see directions above). Engage in cognitive assimilation and accommodation processes.

Consider: the content of each article in light of:

- Best practices in your field
- Issues related to your daily practice
- Situations or conditions you would like to change associated with your practice.

Write: a reflection of the experience and the 3 articles in your Professional Log. Construct a cognitive map linking the key concepts of the key concepts discussed in these articles.

Re-Search: Continue the literature search on the Internet. Refer to the online recommendations for related research sites. Begin to narrow the focus of the search to key variables, concepts, and issues that you believe would be most interesting to better understand.

Review: Begin the Literature Review section of your action research proposal.

Unit Three: Designing and Planning an Action Research Study

From Interesting Questions to Research Designs

March 4

Students are required to write an informal action research proposal during the next two weeks. Students will share the proposal in an electronic version with both of the course instructors. The electronic proposal is DUE no later than March 18. Students will then refine their proposals based on instructors' feedback and begin writing a formal description of the action research project. Students are required to have a weekly email dialogue with the professors to end "midsemester disequilibrium."

Once the professors have approved the research proposal, students will engage in independent research. The professor invites students to call, email or schedule face to face appointments to celebrate accomplishments and insights as well as to resolve problems or probe new venues of interest. Students may meet with Ms. Northcott during regular class time on any week that class does not meet. If a student does not schedule at least one meeting during the semester it is to be considered an active

cue to the instructors that no barriers to success or problems with the research are hampering student achievement.

Permission to Conduct Research Institutional Review Board:

Students are to visit the Webster University IRB site at

<http://www.webster.edu/irb/students.html> The IRB process will be conducted during class time. This will facilitate project planning. Students are directed to print a copy of the IRB form to use during class.

**WEBSTER UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)**

THE IRB PROCESS

1. Determine whether you need to file an IRB form

STUDENT RESEARCHERS

All student initiated research projects utilizing human subjects which are conducted outside the classroom require IRB review. In addition, all Webster University students must have a faculty mentor/advisor (not a committee) who will oversee the execution of the research project.

It is expected that students engaged in the following research endeavors will submit an IRB application:

- * All master's and doctoral projects utilizing human subjects.
- * Research Methods classes that require students to collect data outside the classroom.
- * Any Individualized Learning Experiences involving human subject research.

The aforementioned projects are typically designed to teach students about the mechanics of research. The Institutional Review process is an integral part of scientific research. Special rules may apply for research conducted on Military bases.

Faculty members are responsible for ensuring that students under their direction turn in complete applications. This typically involves several meetings between the faculty member and the student. What is submitted to the IRB should be a polished finished product - complete with signatures and any scripts, forms, and applications to be utilized in data collection.

Please contact the [IRB Chair](#) if you have any questions or are the least bit unsure whether to submit a project for review.

1. Determine whether you need to file an IRB form
2. [Find The Necessary Forms](#)

3. Examine Helpful Tips To Ensure A Smooth Approval Process

Read: Chapter 3: Data Collection Techniques
Appendix B: Descriptive Statistics and Action Research
Chapters 3 – 6 of the U.S. Department of Education Tool Kit for Project Evaluation (handout)

Design: An action research proposal using the IRB form. Submit to instructor for feedback.

Plan: Chapter 11. Begin Action Time Line..

Practice: Note Taking. Review observation (data collection) strategies. Consider three that fit your research question. Review triangulation discussion.

Construct: Schedule for Action Research Proposal.

Write: Develop a complete action research proposal consisting of the following:
Background and Significance of the Research Question (*What are you trying to accomplish?*)
Review of Related Literature (*What have you learned by searching the Internet and reading professional journal that pertains to your quest?*)
Action Plan (*What will you try out?*)
Data Collection Plan (*What data will you collect to provide evidence of the consequences of your actions? How will you gain multiple perspectives? What will you look for in the data?*)
Expectations (*What do you expect to find?*)'

Note: Samples of MAT action research studies will be shared during class. The course instructor will provide a model of her current research study. Submit plan to instructor for approval.

Analyzing and Interpreting Data for Educational Change

March 25, April 1

This titillating phase of the research experience engages students in deep reflection concerning the effects of study and intervention about a particular phenomenon. Class on November 14 will be devoted to data analysis strategies – including exciting ways to portray change that will stimulate colleagues, parents and students to “buy into” the research findings to sustain meaningful and positive growth in students’ practices.

Read: Chapter 5: Data Analysis and Interpretation
Chapter 6: Action Planning for Educational Change

Appendix C: Displaying Data Visually

Practice: Data Analysis Problems on the Web CT

Conduct: Ongoing formative data analysis. Select two ways to present a set of data. Compare the techniques (graph, chart, table) and the “data story” in terms of how well it reflects your question or problem and speaks to the audience.

Draft: Use one sample of the data collected from your study. Construct a 250 word “story about the numbers” from the data. Tell your story in 8 minutes or less to the class.

Unit Four: Writing as a Research Process

Narrative Stories and Expository Texts:
A Marriage Built for Action Research
April 22

These writing and reflection sessions are guided by individual conferences with the professor and by critical conversations with friendly outsiders. A complete, polished oral presentation to the School of Education is celebrated on December 12 when the final paper is also submitted.

Report Format

Review Appendices for models of action research studies and written reports.

Unit Five: Reflecting on the Research Process

Celebrating a Community of Teacher Scholars Who Can and Do
Research
April 23 – May 6

Read: Chapter 18. Conduct final activities. Share insights with the class as a formal presentation. Hand in two bound copies, using APA format to the professors.

Celebrate: The final class, May 6 will celebrate students' professional development as it evolved during the action research projects. Snacks are encouraged.

4. RESOURCES

Text Used: *Action Research: A Guide for the Teacher Researcher 2nd Ed.*
Geoffrey, E. Mills

Supplemental Readings: Disseminated in class or noted as web sites on the syllabus.

5. EVALUATION

- Active engagement in all action research activities *written, discussion*, detailed in the syllabus.
- Orientation essay, field notes, reflective journal, SERP self analysis
- Draft action research proposal submitted by week 8.
- Oral presentation “Reflections of the Action Research Project”

Final copies (2 hard copies spiral bound) of the action research report written in APA format.

6. 3 Hour Courses: Students taking an 8 week course for 3 credit hours will complete the following additional assignments and/or attend the following additional class meetings:

- a) Lab
- b) Curriculum Project
- c) Paper(s)
- d) AV Project
- e) Other

7. FINAL PROJECTS: Final projects/papers will be returned to students in the following manner:
- Students should provide a self-addressed stamped envelope (appropriate size and postage) to the instructor so project/paper can be returned

NOTE; SASE must be included with one copy of the final presentation.

- This syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.
- Regular class attendance is required.