

RS 620 Action Research and Practitioner Inquiry
Boston University School of Education

Summer Session I 2014
(May 20-June 27)
Mondays and Wednesdays 4-7:30
Location: TBA

A practitioner's stance toward inquiry is his [or her] attitude toward the reality with which he [or she] deals.
- Donald Schön

[Practitioner] research is more associated with uncertainty than with certainty, more with posing problems and dilemmas than with solving them, and with the recognition that inquiry both stems from and generates questions.
- Marilyn Cochran-Smith & Susan Lytle

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General Course Description:

Overview of the foundations and techniques for conducting action research and practitioner inquiry. Intended for future and current teachers, special educators, educational leaders, counselors, and other school-based practitioners. Students engage in planning, collecting, and analyzing data through an action research project with the intention of improving their professional practice and developing an inquiry stance. Students will develop an understanding of inquiry questions, conceptual frameworks, methodology, data collection and analysis, and the process of presenting work inside and outside schools.

Course Overview:

Action Research and Practitioner Inquiry encourages the development of an inquiry stance by enabling students to design action research projects that are grounded in authentic practice-based questions. This course is intended for educational practitioners, including teachers, special educators, principals, superintendents, counselors, school psychologists, school librarians, and social workers. Although this course is most beneficial to inservice practitioners, preservice practitioners are encouraged to also take it. If students do not have access to school sites or students, the instructor will help find possible inquiry locations or alternative data sources. This course runs in Summer Session I to allow for data collection while schools are still in session.

This course introduces students to the foundations, purposes, and practices of action research and practitioner inquiry. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) define practitioner inquiry as "systematic and intentional inquiry" carried out by teachers, principals, and other practitioners (p. 7). These practices differ from the observations and assessments that teachers, principals, and other practitioners do daily. Practitioner inquiry is characterized by the careful documentation and systematic analysis of practice over time. It enables teachers, principals, and other practitioners not only to explore central

questions in their own settings, but also to create and share new knowledge about practice. In this class, students will ask critical questions about teaching and learning, curriculum, school management, student development, and educational change, while applying various methods of data collection and analysis, in the design and implementation of action research projects based within practitioners' school sites.

This course is not intended to present practitioner research as a one-time project. Rather, it encourages teachers to embrace inquiry as stance, which Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) described as "work[ing] within inquiry communities to generate local knowledge, envision and theorize their practice, and interpret and interrogate the theory and research of others. Fundamental to this notion is the idea that the work of inquiry communities is both social and political; that is, it involves making problematic the current arrangements of schooling; the ways knowledge is constructed, evaluated, and used; and teachers' individual and collective roles in bringing about change" (p. 289).

This course is organized into five categories: Introduction to Practitioner Research, Forming Questions/Conceptual Lens, Research Methods, Individual or Group Working Sessions (for Peer Support and Review), and Sharing Work with the Community. Each section will explore the basic principles of each category as they apply to teaching, learning, and school leadership and support services. The course instructor will use multiple instructional strategies: lecture, presentations, group work, discussion, guest speakers, etc.

Students are required to complete readings in preparation for each class session. These readings will be discussed in class. Students will also be required to complete a final project where they will engage in their own individual inquiry project. This project is intended to help students develop beginning inquiry skills that they will continue to build on. The inquiry project is not meant to be the end, but instead the beginning of an examination of a question that will be central to your identity as an education practitioner.

Course Objectives:

Through this course, students will:

- comprehend *inquiry as a stance* and its role in teaching, learning, and school leadership
- ask authentic questions about their practice
- gain competence in the appropriate application of action research methods
- analyze and interpret various forms of data related to a central research question
- function as a collaborative research community to support each others' work
- consider the relation of equity, diversity, and/or exceptionalities to their research questions and project designs
- use the Internet and Mugar Library databases in conjunction with traditional literature as resources for research

Required Texts and Readings:

Textbook:

- Efron, S. E. & Ravid, R. (2003). *Action research in education*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Reading Packet:

- Course readings are numbered and can be downloaded from Blackboard (Please bring copies of the readings to class or a computer with the files on it): <http://learn.bu.edu>

Suggested Texts:

(These are suggested resources if you are interested further in practitioner research.

These are not required)

- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (2009). *Inquiry as stance: Practitioner research for the next generation*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Dana, N. F. (2009). *Leading with passion and knowledge: The principal as action researcher*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin. (Educational Leaders)
- Brooks-McNamara, V. (2009). *The reflective school counselor's guide to practitioner research: Skills and strategies for successful inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin. (School Counselors)
- Kincheloe, J. L. (2003). *Teachers as researchers: Qualitative inquiry as a path to empowerment*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer. (Teachers)
- Hendricks, C. C. (2005). *Improving schools through action research: A comprehensive guide for educators*. New York: Allyn & Bacon. (Teachers)
- Altrichter, H., Posch, P., & Somekh, B. (1993). *Teachers investigate their work: An introduction to action research across the professions*. New York: Routledge. (Teachers)

Assignments and Evaluation**Data Assignments**

Points: 50

Description: There will be five data assignments (10 points each) throughout the semester: Big Picture and Research Questions, Literature Review, Methodology Choice, Instrument Design, and Raw Data Collected. For each data assignment, students should upload their work on the Blackboard site. At instructors request, students may also be asked to bring some assignments to class to share with their peers.

Participation: Readings, Class Discussions, and Participation in Working Sessions

Points: 30

Description: Class participation is important for successful learning. Students should regularly contribute to class discussions and participate during group work and class activities. The instructor will be informally assessing if students have read the material by their participation in reading related activities. It is expected that students will attend every class session. If you miss class, this will affect your participation grade.

Inquiry Project - Presentation

Points: 30

Description: Students will present her or his inquiry project using PowerPoint. This will involve summarizing the paper in 10-30 minutes (depending on class size) and taking questions from peers.

Inquiry Project - Final Report

Points: 90

Description: Master's students will write a minimum 10-page report on her or his inquiry project (this is the approximate length for a research conference proposal). Doctoral students will write a minimum 20-page report on her or his inquiry project (this is the approximate length for a research conference paper or journal article). Following the format of a traditional educational research article, but with a connection to the "big picture" questions that you embrace as a teacher in the study's conclusion. These papers will be posted on Blackboard, so it can be shared among the students in our class. Students will also be encouraged to submit their work to regional and national practitioner research conferences, so it may be shared with the greater teaching, leadership, and research communities (If you choose to do this and it is accepted, the instructor will help you prepare for any conference presentations).

There are 200 points total for the course. All assignments will be graded using a rubric (all rubrics are posted on the Blackboard site) and all grades will be returned in class or via e-mail. Assignments will be collected via Blackboard system. Late assignments will have the grade decreased by 10% for each day late. Students may gain an extension in advance with permission of the instructor or when extenuating circumstance do not allow for forewarning.

Student Research and the BU Institutional Review Board

Students are not allowed to publish from the data collected in research courses. All student research studies must follow the correct procedures, including approval by the Boston University Charles River Campus Institutional Review Board. For more information, read the BU IRB Student Guidelines at: <http://www.bu.edu/irb/home/students-as-researchers/>

Statement of Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

The School of Education at Boston University is committed to equal access for students with disabilities. If you have a specific disability and require accommodations in this class, please let me know early in the semester so that appropriate accommodations can be made. You must provide me with a letter of needed accommodations prepared by the Office of Disability Services. Contact information for that office is as follows: 617 353-3658 V/TTY or access@bu.edu. All discussions and written materials will be kept confidential.

Incomplete Grades

Please note that incomplete grades are reserved for extenuating circumstances. Incomplete grades will not be granted without permission. If permission is received, work must be submitted two weeks prior to the close of the next semester.

Plagiarism

The pursuit of knowledge can proceed only when scholars take responsibility and receive credit for their work. Recognition of individual contributions to knowledge and of the intellectual property of others builds trust within the University and encourages the sharing of ideas that is essential to scholarship. Plagiarism, that is, failure to properly acknowledge sources, written or electronic, used for verbatim quotations or ideas, is a violation of academic integrity. Each student is responsible for learning and using proper methods of paraphrasing and footnoting, quotation, and other forms of citation, to ensure that the original author, speaker, illustrator, or source of the material used is clearly acknowledged.

Course Schedule

Class	Topic(s)	Readings Due ¹	Assignments Due
1 5/20	<p>Course Introduction and Overview Instructor and teacher introductions/course syllabus/Blackboard</p> <p>Introduction to Practitioner Research What is action research and practitioner research?</p> <p>“Big picture” and inquiry questions</p>		
2 5/27	<p>Forming Questions/Conceptual Lens</p> <p>Examples of practitioner research (Different sizes and shapes)</p> <p>Literature searching and writing it up</p> <p>Discuss inquiry project research questions with class</p>	<p>TEXT-Efron & Ravid Ch. 1, 2</p> <p>Choose 1 (although you are encouraged to read more):</p> <p>1-Martell & Hashimoto-Martell (Secondary History and Textbooks)</p> <p>2-Martell (Secondary History and Teaching Race)</p> <p>3-Hashimoto-Martell (Elementary Science and Students of Color)</p> <p>4-MacPhail (Elementary Writing Curriculum and Boys)</p> <p>5-Whitin (Secondary English and Interpreting Texts)</p> <p>6-Kenney (Secondary English and Queer-Inclusive Texts)</p> <p>7-Gutstein (Secondary Math and Social Justice)</p> <p>8-Ekk (Special Education/Educational Leadership and AYP)</p> <p>9-Buckles (Educational Leadership and Classroom Instruction)</p> <p>10-Zinck & Littrell (Counseling and At-risk Adolescent Girls)</p>	<p>Data Assignment 1: Big Picture and Research Questions</p> <p>(NOTE: Read the assigned readings before completing Data Assignment 1)</p>
3 5/30 (Substitute Monday Schedule)	<p>Research Methods</p> <p>Conceptual frameworks</p> <p>Choosing a method/mode of inquiry</p>	<p>11-Cochran-Smith & Lytle*</p> <p>12-Cochran-Smith & Lytle Ch. 1*</p> <p>TEXT-Efron & Ravid Ch. 3</p>	

¹ All readings with a star must be read. Readings without a star are part of a choice, which students will chose in the prior class.

Class	Topic(s)		Assignments Due
4 6/1	<p>Research Methods Data collection (Designing and implementing interview/focus groups protocols, journals, surveys, and other instruments)</p> <p>Working Sessions² Design instruments</p>		<p>Data Assignment 2: Literature Review</p> <p>Data Assignment 3: Methodology Choice</p>
5 6/3	<p>Research Methods National Institute for Health – Protecting Human Subjects</p> <p>Working Sessions Students will test interview protocol, journal prompts, or surveys with inquiry groups</p>	TEXT-Efron & Ravid Ch. 4	Data Assignment 4: Instrument Design
6 6/8	<p>Research Methods Data collection (Transcribing, inputting quantitative data)</p> <p>Working Sessions Students will begin using research programs to transcribe/input data</p>	TEXT-Efron & Ravid Ch. 5 (Optional: Ch. 6)	Data Assignment 5: Collect and Process Data (Part 1: Bring to class unprocessed data.)
7 6/10	<p>Research Methods Data analysis (Coding, Statistical Analysis) and making sense of the data. Using free computer programs for research: NVIVO/HyperRESEARCH (Qualitative) and Excel (Quantitative)</p> <p>Working Sessions Students will begin using research programs to code data/run statistical analyses</p>		Data Assignment 5: Collect and Process Data (Part 2: Bring to class processed data.)

² During these working sessions, you should bring a laptop computer. If you do not have a laptop, please let the instructor know.

Class	Topic(s)	Readings Due	Assignments Due
8 6/15	<p>Research Methods Data analysis (Writing up analysis)</p> <p>Working Sessions Students will continue using research programs to code data/run statistical analyses</p>	TEXT-Efron & Ravid Ch. 7, 8	
9 6/17	<p>Research Methods Writing up the final research report</p> <p>Working Sessions Preparing the presentation and research report</p> <p>Critical Friends Groups</p>	13-Zeichner and Noffke*	
10 6/22	<p>Research Methods Turn the rough draft into the final paper</p> <p>Presentations</p> <p>Working Sessions Preparing the presentation and research report</p>		<p>Inquiry Project PowerPoint Presentations (file name as LastNamePresentation.ppt)</p> <p>Upload to Blackboard by 10 pm on 6/22.</p>
11 6/24	<p>LAST CLASS</p> <p>Evaluations</p> <p>Celebration</p> <p>Reflections and Final Thoughts</p>		<p>Inquiry Project Report is due (Word format – file name as LastNameFinalReport.doc). Brief comments will be sent via e-mail. If you would like comments on your entire project, arrange with instructor.</p>

READING LIST

Reading 1

Martell, C. C., & Hashimoto-Martell, E. A. (2012). Throwing out the textbook: A teacher research study of changing texts in the history classroom. In H. Hickman & B. J. Porfilio (Eds.), *The new politics of the textbook: Critical analysis in the core content areas* (pp. 305-320). Boston, MA: Sense Publishers.

Reading 2

Martell, C. C. (2013). Race and histories: Examining culturally relevant teaching in the U.S. history classroom. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 41(1), 65-88.

Reading 3

Hashimoto-Martell, E. A. (2011). *Exploring science identities of elementary students of color*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.

Reading 4

MacPhail, G. (2009). *The "bad boy" and the writing curriculum*. In M. Cochran-Smith & S. L. Lytle (Eds.). *Inquiry as stance: Practitioner research for the next generation* (pp. 193-212). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Reading 5

Whitin, P. E. (1996). Exploring visual response to literature. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 30(1), 114-140.

Reading 6

Kenney, L. M. (2010). Being out and reading queer-inclusive texts in a high school English classroom. In M. V. Blackburn, C. T. Clark, L. M. Kenney, & J. M. Smith (Eds.), *Acting out!: Combating homophobia through teacher activism* (pp. 56-73). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Reading 7

Gutstein, E. (2003). Teaching and learning mathematics for social justice in an urban, Latino school. *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*, 34(1), 37-73.

Reading 8

Ekk, V. B. (2011). *Unintended consequences: A practitioner researcher's study of the impact of No Child Left Behind on middle school special education students*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.

Reading 9

Buckles, T. T. (2008). Monitoring what goes on in the school building: A closer inspection of classroom instruction and student learning through implementation of the continuous improvement model. In D.C. Delane & S.B. Hayes (Eds.) *Improving Florida schools through teacher inquiry* (pp. 229-238). Gainesville, Florida: Center for School Improvement and North East Florida Educational Consortium.

Reading 10

Zinck, K. & Littrell, J. M. (2000). Action research shows group counseling effective with at-risk adolescent girls. *Professional School Counseling*, 4(1), 50-59.

Reading 11

Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (1993). *Inside/outside: Teacher research and knowledge*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press. (Chapter 1: Research on Teaching and Teacher Research: The Issues that Divide)

Reading 12

Zeichner, K. M., & Noffke, S. E. (2001). Practitioner research. In V. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (4th ed., pp. 298-330). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.