

An Action Research Model for Middle School Teachers

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Kathy wasn't new to middle school by any stretch of the imagination, but she didn't feel quite savvy enough to question things with any authority either. Instead, she'd spent a lot of her time in that gray area between feeling frustrated about some stuff and feeling satisfied about others.

Her school wasn't new to a middle school philosophy, either. In fact, the existing faculty was a stable group of educators who had decided as a single unit to plunge into the concept about six years ago, not long after Kathy had joined them. Their principal had been skeptical but supportive, and he agreed to approach the district with the question of converting their large junior high to a middle school based on concepts that had proved successful elsewhere in the state. So, with neighboring districts available for guidance and with the help of the university next door, Northwest Junior High began the slow but steady process toward Northwest Middle School.

With some leadership from the faculty of a local university's middle grades program, the conversion had gone quite smoothly: Teams were immediately formed and the faculty implemented a popular block schedule. Teachers worked hard on interdisciplinary curriculum development and brought in preservice teachers from the university to help them sort out ideas and theory. Students' parents and community leaders came on board quickly and the local businesses began to see the value of a closer, more unified approach to educating early adolescents. All in all, it seemed like just what they'd hoped for, and more.

Kathy had never been much of a worrier but she now, a few years later, had to confess that something here had begun to bother her. You could look around the place and see a textbook in action: Photos on the walls, student work in the hallways, high standardized test scores, no discipline problems... a teacher's dream, right? Nope, wrong, she kept thinking, something's wrong. Try as she might, however, she couldn't get a handle on anything tangible.

Kathy had thought about ways to better understand middle school concepts. Obtaining an M.Ed. had been a dream of hers for a while, and she'd taken advantage of the relationship with the university to get started on one a year ago. This spring had brought her third class, and one that she had been really looking forward to: Adolescence and Learning. The course description included phrases like "educating the whole child" and "aspects of development often overlooked by teachers and misunderstood by parents." It sounded like a break from the heavier stuff and just interesting enough to keep her looking forward to a weekly three-hour class. After the first couple of nights, Kathy realized that she was definitely going to get more than she bargained for.

The class, taught by a former middle school teacher turned professor, did indeed focus on early adolescent development, but it set the information into a background that was rich in middle school theory. In addition, the group's size was just small enough to offer the opportunity for individualized interaction on a weekly basis. This meant that it didn't take long for Kathy to feel OK about speaking out to the group, and she felt just fine about

sharing the details of her nagging school doubts. The farther they got into that mixture of theory and application, the clearer it became that Northwest had somehow lost its children over the past couple of years.

Oh sure, the halls were filled with evidence of strong teaching and the standardized test scores proved the results. Kathy had to admit, though, that it had been a few years since anyone had really asked the question of just who are we teaching this stuff to? It seemed that their original enthusiasm about middle school had gotten buried under the overarching enthusiasm for test scores and clean discipline reports.

To add to her epiphany, Kathy's course then took a swing toward exploring social and emotional development in early adolescents, and she quickly came to understand the obvious: Northwest did a terrific job of taking into account their students' intellectual and even physical needs, but it stopped short of their social and emotional development, unless you wanted to count the twice-a-semester-heavily-chaperoned-after-school dances. Somehow she was having a hard time making those match up to the needs that she was coming to realize through their reading and discussing in class, and then her observing and discussing with her own students.

As if sensing her frustration during their discussions, the professor in the course introduced Kathy to the idea of Advisory, and she was hooked. Well, hooked maybe, but still not sure of what to do with the information. The more she dug around and read on it, the more she felt certain that this was the next step that Northwest needed to take.

"So how do you get started on something like that?" she'd asked, and the quick answer had been to present it through an action research proposal. She chewed on this for a while, and was actually surprised to realize how nervous she was about that. Again, Kathy wasn't new to middle school, but she didn't feel quite savvy enough to question things openly with any authority either. How could she make that work? She was relieved to learn that the next semester's course in the sequence, The Philosophy and Curriculum

of Middle Grades Education, carried an action research assignment with it, which actually provided the beginnings of her degree's capstone project. Armed with a strong explanation and copies of the capstone project's final requirements, Kathy sailed home happier, determined that adding Advisory to the school day was their answer, and that action research was the vehicle for getting it there.

How is Action Research Defined?

Over the past fifty years, the definitions of action research have changed slightly. These changes can perhaps be best summarized through such language as: "Action research is a three-step spiral process of (1) planning, which involves reconnaissance, or describing the facts; (2) taking action; and (3) fact-finding about the results of the action." (Lewin, 1947). "Action research is the process by which practitioners attempt to study their problems scientifically in order to guide, correct, and evaluate their decisions and actions." (Corey, 1953). "Action research in education is often conducted by colleagues in a school setting who desire ways to improve instruction." (Glickman, 1992). Finally, and most recently, "Action research is a fancy way of saying let's study what's happening at our school and decide how to make it a better place." (Calhoun, 1994).

Our department, the Department of Middle Grades, Secondary, and K-12 Education, embraces the goal of assisting our graduate students in conducting practical research in their own classrooms using solid methodological applications. In achieving this goal, we teach them tools that will be useful throughout their careers, tools that they can also use and teach across their team and the larger school faculty as the need presents itself. Therefore, our department relies on Calhoun's (1994) definition of action research (what is happening here and how do we make it better) as a guidepost for our work, as it makes sense to teachers and is more invitational in concept. It was, in fact, this definition that was first introduced to Kathy and her colleagues, and it was this definition that provided the vehicle that she

employed to professionally address her frustrations and eventually improve her practice.

What Can Other Researchers Add to The Conversation?

Action research is defined as a form of self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Today, action research is promoted as a process of individual reflection on practice, as a process to support staff development in schools, as a collaborative process to support teachers' professional development, and as a strategy to guide site-based school improvement. Further, an individual like Kathy, a small group like her team or her content colleagues, or her entire school faculty, can undertake it. No matter how it is initiated, however, part of its promise is the constant ability to build the capacities of individuals and organizations to move beyond current understandings and practices (Allen & Calhoun, 1998).

More specifically, the purpose of individual teacher research is usually focused on changes in a single classroom; in addition, teams of teachers could also use action research to investigate issues of common concern. For example, whether as individuals or teams, teachers may examine things like classroom climate, management, instructional strategies, materials, or students' cognitive or social behavior (Calhoun, 1994). On a bigger scale, and in collaborative school-wide research, teachers, administrators, and other personnel convene to solve a problem, share across classrooms within one school, or research to find solutions to district-wide issues. This improves a school in three venues: the faculty should be better able to work together to identify and solve problems collectively; the equity among students should improve as all are offered developmentally appropriate levels of instruction; and the school's level of expertise in the area researched improves throughout the entire building. Educational research methodology is approached in the

same manner, whether initiated by an individual, a team, or the entire faculty.

Kurt Lewin (1952) first coined and spread the term action research. Lewin was a social psychologist who focused on the action of understanding change as it impacted issues of prejudice and democratic behaviors. According to Lewin, the three compulsory characteristics of action research include its participatory character, its democratic impulse, and its simultaneous contribution to social science and social change. In terms of method, a self-reflective spiraling cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting is central to the action research approach (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). In short, the fundamental aim of action research is to improve practice rather than to produce knowledge (Elliot, 1991).

Action research is generally a sequenced process, with one broad step following another. Therefore, research first begins with the obvious step of identifying and clarifying a general idea, which refers to a state of affairs or a situation one wishes to change or improve (Elliot, 1991, Lewin, 1947). For instance:

- The majority of students in the class have devalued homework to the point that many no longer do it, and yet we as a team see this as a critical extension of the class proceedings. How can we make homework time productive once again? How can parents help with this? What if parents refuse to emphasize homework?

- Many teachers like Kathy have begun to worry over the emphasis on high stakes summative testing as opposed to a well-rounded education that accounts for not only academics, but also social, emotional, and physical development in the early adolescent. How can we blend all of these concerns, including the acknowledged need for accountability, into one seamless approach to middle grades education?

No matter what topic is selected, educators should be wary about choosing issues that they cannot or should not impact, like socioeconomic status, a child's family traditions, or cultural differences.

The second step is reconnaissance (Lewin, 1952) which can be divided into describing the facts of the situation and then explaining those facts. In the initial identification, the

teacher researchers develop inquiries as to why the problem is occurring. Next, (Lewin, 1952) they design a working plan and determine the steps necessary for successfully executing the plan. They then begin the process of data collection and uncovering the answers to their questions about why the problem initially arose (Lewin, 1952). In doing so, these action researchers move from a description of the facts to a critical analysis of the data and context surrounding the problem.

As Kathy could tell us clearly, the third step is also the most exciting. It is at this point that the researchers move back into their environment and have an opportunity to implement the results of their data collection and analysis, making changes based on their findings. For example, Kathy presented her frustrations to her team, who quickly acknowledged that they, too, worried about losing their personal connections with their students' lives. After some reading and discussion that focused on Advisory, the team decided to approach the Leadership Council for permission to implement an action research project with their students. The team felt that this could provide a pilot approach that might later lead to a full school-wide implementation of Advisory. With support from the Leadership Council, guidance from Kathy's professor, and a great deal of focused work by her school team, the research project yielded solid findings. These were shared across the middle school faculty at one of the last meetings before summer break, and the entire group agreed to implement Advisory in the fall.

Both teachers and students have benefited from action research in many ways. Kember et al. (2000) found that teachers acquired a deeper understanding of innovative teaching, were able to change and improve their current teaching practices, and became skilled educational researchers in general. More specifically, (Kember, 2000) noted that many participants reported acquiring deeper understanding of innovative teaching, or had changed the ways they conceptualized teaching. Further, teachers like Kathy who never felt empowered enough to attempt action research, now find that this experience energizes

them to activate the change process in their environments.

In terms of teacher-student relationships, teachers ascertained that implementing action research allowed them to better understand student learning as well as their attitudes. Consequently, teachers were more aware of students' needs and feelings, which usually resulted in stronger relationships. Because of the action research process, middle school students profited in their learning experiences, learning behaviors, and learning outcomes. Their teachers profited in a number of ways, including increased self-esteem and increased levels of competence in solving problems and making decisions related to teaching and learning (Oja & Smulyan, 1989).

Though the benefits of action research in the classroom are clear, there are some downsides. Karvonor-Lee (1998) wonders, "in a system where teachers already feel overwhelmed by testing and curriculum expectations and where class sizes increase rather than decrease, how can I continually engage in productive [narrative] inquiry with my students and take time to listen to [them]?" This is an issue for most teachers in the public schools because, like Kathy, much of their class time now revolves around end-of-the-year testing.

However, there are some ways to implement action research while tying in the necessary curriculum as well. It takes time, maybe even years to coordinate an effective system, but it is worth the effort. For example, and perhaps most obviously, teachers like Kathy associate themselves with university programs that teach the action research process, and then support its implementation. This support lends initial credibility, true, but it does more; it helps teachers gain both the confidence and skills necessary for not only conducting their own studies, but for teaching the process to colleagues, who then use it as well. This ripple effect can be quite powerful in a school or district, and can be the harbinger of many focused changes that lead to increased productivity for all constituents. A second system might involve the self-education that comes from professional readings and discussions among

colleagues. This form of staff development costs no more than the books purchased, and it can lead to changes that are just as powerful as those initiated by a university classroom. The following section can perhaps better explain this, as it illustrates a university's approach to teaching action research methodology, and it might also be used with faculty members who are interested in reading and studying the approach aside from a formal course.

Classroom-Based Action Research: An Illustration

Kathy found that her university experiences prepared her well for tackling classroom problems and concerns that caught her attention. Like her colleagues in our middle grades Masters in Education (M.Ed.) and Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) programs, Kathy eventually took three research-based courses within her 39-hour program: RSCH 6101- Introduction to Educational Research, MDLG 6225-Issues in Middle Grades Education, and MDSK 6681-the Capstone Experience course.

RSCH 6101 is an introductory research course covering qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and is the first class in the program sequence. As such, it underscores the importance of teacher as researcher, and it opens the door to an empowering process that students call on throughout the remainder of their degree program. MDLG 6225 is the Issues in Middle Grades Education course that first introduced Kathy to action research, and specifically, the project that led her to examine her students' developmental needs more closely.

MDSK 6691, the final course in the program, pulls these two classes together through an individual capstone project that utilizes research methodology in a middle grades setting. It is in this last course that students like Kathy complete the planning and implementation of their action research projects (Details in Appendix A). As is fairly traditional across institutions of higher education, students choose a committee of three graduate faculty to direct their research, which includes a chair. Because of their work in MDLG 6225, students

have selected a topic and completed a general review of related literature prior to beginning this final course. In consultation with the course instructor and committee chair, the student immediately completes the proposal and submits it to the university Institutional Review Board (IRB), a process that often occurs before the first class meeting in MDSK 6691. Once the proposal has been approved by the IRB, the student begins collecting data.

Specifically, in the MDSK 6691 course the instructor guides the class's students through the process and provides them with many examples of action research, which leads to a deeper understanding of this process. One of the areas of clarification includes helping students learn what action research is and what it is not. The current course instructor uses the Madison Wisconsin Metropolitan School District's website <http://www.madison.k12.wi.us/sod/car/cardo.html> as a springboard for explaining what action research is not:

1. It is not the usual things teachers do when they think about their teaching. It is systematic and involves collecting evidence on which to base rigorous reflection.

2. It is not just problem solving. It involves problem posing, and not just problem solving. It does not start from a view of problems as pathologies. It is motivated by a quest to improve and understand the world by changing it and learning how to improve it from the effects of the changes made.

3. It is not research on other people. It is research by particular people on their own work to help them improve what they do. It does not treat people as objects.

4. It is not a scientific method applied to teaching. It is not about hypothesis testing or about using data to come to conclusions. It is concerned with changing situations, not just interpreting them. It takes the researcher into view. It is a systematically evolving process of changing both the researcher and the situation in which he or she works.

Once our graduate students are able to identify action research, they are instructed to consider questions they may want to ask. Generally, they are required to think about

the significance of their topic, which should be based on their own classroom experiences (with the caveat that they may decide to change topics or procedures as the research progresses). In addition, they are asked to consider such things as whether they can control the topic and if they can conduct the research in the time period they have (usually one to two semesters).

Again, using the Madison website as a springboard, our students are shown the benefits of their research, which generally include: sharing and collaboration across departments, disciplines, and grade levels; increasing dialogue about instructional issues and student learning; enhancing communication between teachers and students; improving the performance of students; revising practice based on new knowledge about teaching and learning; increasing teacher-designed and initiated staff development; developing priorities for school-wide planning and assessment efforts; and contributing to the profession's body of knowledge about teaching and learning.

With such obvious benefits, we find that our masters' candidates become excited about this opportunity and are eager to conduct research that can provide genuine and sustained improvements in their classrooms and schools. They feel empowered as they reflect on and assess their teaching. They like the idea of testing their ideas and assessing the effectiveness of new approaches. Finally, sharing with fellow class members and making decisions about approaches to their research leads to a sense of renewal and anticipation about making changes that can dramatically improve their teaching situations.

There is a growing body of evidence featuring the positive personal and professional effects that engaging in action research has on the practitioner (Goswami & Stillman, 1987; Lieberman, 1988). For example, action research provides teachers with the opportunity to gain knowledge and skill in research methods and applications and to become more aware of the options and possibilities for change. They become more critical and reflective about their own practice (Oja & Pine, 1989; Street, 1986). Finally, research indicates that teachers engaging

in action research attend more carefully to their methods, their perceptions and understandings, and their whole approach to the teaching process.

In Conclusion

Rudduck, 1988 once said, "It is teachers who, in the end, will change the world of the school by understanding it." As teachers engage in action research they increase their understanding of the schooling process. Teachers' learning has an impact on what happens in classrooms as well as the directions of staff development and school improvement. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) suggest, the unique feature of teachers' questions is that they emanate solely neither from theory nor from practice, but from "critical reflection on the intersection of the two" (p. 6). It has been said that, teachers often leave a mark on their students, but they seldom leave a mark on their profession (Wolfe, 1989). Through action research teachers will influence decisions and become active stakeholders in educational changes and improvements.

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Appendix A

Capstone Project: Action
ResearchUniversity of North Carolina at
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The Capstone Experience for the M.Ed. or
MAT in Middle Grades Education

THE MASTER'S ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

Dear Graduate Student:

Please carefully read these descriptive materials about the option available to you as a candidate in the M.Ed. or MAT degree program. When you have chosen an action research topic, please schedule an appointment with your committee chair. This dedicated consultation should be held (early in the M.Ed. program or early in Phase Two of the MAT Program) in order to thoroughly explore your topic and to then begin planning and developing this requirement, which will culminate in your last course, MDSK 6691. MDSK 6691 cannot be taken prior to the semester you plan to graduate and may not be taken until the last six hours of the program. It may not be taken with more that one other graduate level course.

The action research model is generally conducted in your own classroom. It focuses on a point of interest or concern that you have and allows you to utilize your research skills to address this issue in a practical format designed to improve your classroom. Grounded in research and focused data collection, the project will yield suggestions useful to you and to your colleagues at school, as well as in conference, staff development, and publication situations. You should remain aware of the College's Conceptual Framework at all times, and you should select your topic or issue with one or more strands of this framework in mind. Again, your Committee Chair can guide you through this initial step to deeper understanding.

The College of Education's Framework guides all teacher education programs at UNC Charlotte by supporting the development of

Excellent Professionals who are knowledgeable about their subject matter, learners, schools, problems and solutions; effective in planning, teaching, assessing, modifying, and relating; reflective about their own beliefs, practices, effectiveness, and growth; leaders with students, parents, colleagues, and community; and responsive to the diverse needs of students, parents, and professional communities. These five standards should help guide you in the selection and implementation of your action research project.

You will need to form a committee of three members. Your committee chair and one other committee member must be members of the MDSK Department; the third member may be a member of another UNCC department. All committee members must be Graduate Faculty. The capstone project requires an oral presentation by your Graduate Committee during your final semester. This will be scheduled and rehearsed during the capstone course, MDSK 6691.

The following pages supply a great deal of detail, and your advisor can answer all of your questions. With that bit said, congratulations on your acceptance into a strong Master's degree program. Now let's get started!

THE MASTER'S ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT IN MIDDLE GRADES AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Definition:

The Master's Action Research Project is a formal piece of student scholarship that investigates a particular problem in middle grades or secondary education and attempts to provide a data-based, practical solution to that problem. It reflects a synthesis of all five program goals (a teacher who is knowledgeable, effective, reflective, responsive, and who exhibits leadership skills).

Components of the Development and Execution of a Master's Action Research Project, to be Guided By Your Graduate Committee Chair:

- Development of a tentative proposal prior to MDSK 6691
- Approval from the Institutional Research Board
- Completion and presentation of a formal proposal to your Graduate Committee
- Approval of that proposal by your Graduate Committee
- Implementation of the proposed research project before and/or during MDSK 6691
- Completion of a action research document during MDSK 6691
- Presentation of the results during MDSK 6691

Programmatic Support for the Master's Action Research Project:

- Development of perspectives and extended examination of critical issues in middle or secondary grades education
- Development of basic skills in quantitative and qualitative research design and methodology in coursework; for example, RSCH 6101
- Implementation of a classroom-based action research project
- Development of the initial proposal through a Department Graduate Committee prior to MDSK 6691 and based on RSCH 6101
- Collaborative support from peers and Department faculty throughout coursework
- Development and presentation of final action research report in MDSK 6691

The Master's Action Research Project Notes and Suggestions for Graduate Committee Work and in MDSK 6691

- Carefully review both the Department's packet of information describing this capstone option. Follow all procedures carefully, including regular consultation with your Chair and Graduate Committee members.
- Make certain that you have full IRB approval before you begin your data collection.
- Incorporate everything you've learned in your research course and other classes.
- The following suggestions are simply another way of discussing the points from the Department and College guidelines and your research class.

PHASE ONE: SELECTING A TOPIC

Choose topic of genuine interest or concern

- A. Must have high level of integrity and academic rigor
- B. Must demand intense study in your classroom (You'll live with it for a long time!)
- C. May need frequent collaboration among team or department members, but you are solely responsible for the final report
- D. For example, topics might include:
 - 1. The achievement gap in reading among your 7th grade students
 - 2. Using textbooks vs. computer generated reading selections
- E. Has your concern or interest already been thoroughly addressed in a way that relates to your specific situation? If so, then simply read and interpret those studies into your context and don't spend time "reinventing the wheel." Select another concern or issue to investigate.
- F. If not, or if in a way that does not fully address your topic, ask yourself if this remains of interest to you.
- G. Discuss your possible topic selection with your colleagues. Does it still sound valuable? If yes, proceed.

PHASE TWO: DRAFTING THE PROPOSAL

Draft the proposal in future tense, including a signature page. It becomes your contract with your committee and therefore, must have the signature of each member of your committee.

H. Introduction and Overview (including an identification of the problem)

- 1. A rationale for choosing topic
- 2. Brief look at what you propose to do in order to directly address your curiosity or concern. One common (and effective) way to accomplish this is to list two to four questions that you'd like to investigate. Later, address these questions in the conclusion section by discussing a possible answer for each one. These answers will be based on a combination of your lit review and data analysis.
- 3. Are there terms that are fairly uncommon to the general population, yet which are critical to the understanding of your final report? If so, define them now as you will use them later; for example: literacy, early adolescence, criterion referenced testing)

I. Review of the Literature

- 4. What have others researched and concluded about your topic?
- 5. Go back through any standard reading done in II (above). Which studies were most valuable for purposes of your study?
- 6. Organize these into an annotated bibliography (APA 5th edition style citation and two or three summarizing sentences that directly connect it to your study).
- 7. Begin to write this section. (The more you do now, the less you'll do later.) If time doesn't permit, then a heavy annotation will be acceptable in the final proposal, but not in the final product.
- 8. Other titles may be added later, but for the most part, few to none may be deleted.

J. Research Questions, Methodology and Procedures

9. Context of study, including participants (You'll want other teachers to see how your context compares to theirs for the purpose of replication or enhanced understanding.) Include all things of importance; for example, if your topic is writing, you'll want to report students' literacy levels, grade levels, ages, etc.

10. How will you gather your data? Determine informal and formal data collection procedures and valid and reliable instruments; use at least three different sources for your data collection (for example: surveys, questionnaires, interviews with various stakeholders, your observations and a researcher's field log, video and/or audio taping, student writing and/or journals, a colleague's contribution through observations or such, archival data, checklist of common characteristics, etc.)

11. Draft the design of your data collection instruments. Select a method that works for your Action Research project. (This will ensure committee feedback.)

12. How will you analyze the data (Quantitatively? Qualitatively? A combination? And then how, within those specific parameters)

13. How will you report the data? (bar graph, case study, tables, etc.) Be very specific, though this may change slightly.

K. Suggested format:

14. Title page (indicate that you're an M.Ed. or Phase Two MAT candidate)

15. Sections (as described above)

16. Bibliography

17. Appendices (Labeled individually)

- Submit your proposal for feedback from the committee.
- While you're waiting, continue to work on your literature review. Remember to stay focused on your topic!
- As you implement each section, revise it for past tense.

PHASE THREE: REPORTING THE RESULTS (including analysis and findings) Refer to APA, 5th edition for examples

A. What did your subjects say? What do you data indicate? (Can you verify this by finding the same thing in multiple pieces of collected data? Can you triangulate your data from the sources you have used?) Move logically through each data collection instrument and report what it told you. Do not add personal opinions here, simply the information that you collected from the study's participants.

B. Keep clarity at a premium by using sub-heads and visual organizers whenever possible. Each figure, table, graph, etc. should be followed by a brief paragraph of explanation.

C. Keep this section focused and clear. It can get tedious and hazy.

PHASE FOUR: DRAWING CONCLUSIONS BASED ON THE ANALYSIS AND ITS LINK TO THE EXISTING RESEARCH

A. Tie your lit review and the results of your data collection together: Does one support the other? If so, how? If not, why not? If not, how does your study change or add to the existing knowledge base?

B. What has this study taught you and/or how will it change your teaching or class procedures? Does it have any implications for your team members or school colleagues? (This will be very personal and may include a statement or two that indicates the degree to which you deem the study successful.)

C. Are there implications for further research? If so, what?

D. Other concluding comments that may be necessary

FINISHING UP

A. Prepare a careful bibliography in 5th edition APA style

B. Organize any appendices (must have been referenced in the body of the report... letters, blank copies of instruments, etc.)

- C. Proofread everything carefully.
- D. Review the College of Education guidelines.

Have you completed everything? If yes, submit a final copy to each committee member via your chair, and schedule your final examination.

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Scoring Rubric: Master's Research Project

Elements	Relationship to Conceptual Framework	Unacceptable (U)	Acceptable (A)	Target (Publishable) (T)	Final Score
Statement of the Problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Responsive to Equity/Diversity ▪ Knowledgeable ▪ Reflective 	<p>Gives no attention to problems affecting diverse learners. Not a contemporary problem. No evidence provided to support the significance of the problem. Is not applicable to a larger population. Gives little or no description of the proposed approach for investigating the problem.</p>	<p>Addresses diverse learners*. Contemporary and relevant. There is adequate evidence provided to support the significance of the problem. Problem is applicable to a larger population. Proposed approach for investigating the problem is appropriate. *See NCATE definition of diversity.</p>	<p>Problem is well-defined, well-grounded in addresses a significant problem for diverse learners, and is applicable to populations beyond that to be studied. There is abundant and compelling evidence provided to support the significance of the problem. The proposed approach is rigorous with some unique characteristic(s).</p>	
Review of Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Knowledgeable 	<p>Articles chosen are not relevant to the problem. Articles are out of date and not seminal. Articles are from non-refereed journals or other inappropriate sources. Insufficient number of research articles and primary sources. There is no mention of diverse learners.</p>	<p>Organizes, integrates, and evaluates articles to provide clarification of the problem and support the chosen methodology. Articles are relevant, timely, and seminal, coming primarily from refereed journals and primary sources. Preponderance of appropriate research articles. Articles or discussions provide linkage to diverse learners.</p>	<p>Extensive review that includes summaries, synthesis, and critiques of exceptionally rigorous evidence-based sources that strongly support the statement of the problem and all the components of the proposed methodology.</p>	
Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Knowledgeable ▪ Effective ▪ Responsive to Equity/Diversity 	<p>For this type of research project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Significant elements of methodology are inappropriate for the problem under study (participants, setting, procedures and materials, and/or instruments) ▪ The methodology does not focus on the diverse learners as stated in the problem. ▪ The discussion of reliability (or consistency) and validity (or accuracy of measurement) is omitted, insufficient, or inaccurate. 	<p>For this type of research project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The elements of methodology are appropriate for the problem under study. ▪ The methodology focuses on diverse learners as stated in the problem. ▪ The discussion of reliability (or consistency) and validity (or accuracy of measurement) is correct and sufficient, with problems having been identified. 	<p>For this type of research project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The elements of methodology are both appropriate for the problem under study and represent the quality necessary for publication. ▪ The methodology addresses more than one kind of diverse learner. ▪ Reliability (or consistency) and validity (or accuracy of measurement) has been firmly established. 	

Elements	Relationship to Conceptual Framework	Unacceptable (U)	Acceptable (A)	Target (T)	Final Score
Data Analysis and Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Knowledgeable ▪ Effective 	Does not report data analyses as planned in the proposal. Makes major errors in data analyses or reporting of findings. Blurs distinctions between data and interpretations. Makes inappropriate claims of significance.	Reports data analyses as planned in the proposal. Makes few errors in data analyses and reporting of findings. Maintains distinctions between data and interpretations. Makes appropriate claims of significance (if applicable). <i>Analyzes data using diversity variables.</i>	Reports data analyses, <i>including diversity-related findings</i> , with a level of clarity and accuracy necessary for publication.	
Interpretations, Conclusions, Implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reflective ▪ Effective ▪ Responsive to Equity/Diversity 	Draws unrelated, inaccurate, or overstated conclusions from the data. Stated limitations of the study are inaccurate or insufficient. Implications for future research are either omitted, insufficient, or unrelated to the findings or to the limitations in the study.	Draws accurate conclusions from the data. Stated limitations of the study are appropriate. Implications for practice are thoughtful and appropriately related to the findings, the diverse learners, and/or the limitations in the study.	Conclusions are accurate, appropriately linked to the problem and methodology. Implications for practice and future research are compelling in their potential applications for diverse learners. Conclusions add to the knowledge base and are extraordinarily insightful in their implications for further study.	
Quality of Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Knowledgeable 	<i>Mechanics:</i> Did not adhere to APA guidelines or other assigned style requirements. Numerous errors of spelling, typing, grammar, format, sequencing.	<i>Mechanics:</i> Very few or minor errors in use of APA guidelines or other assigned style requirements. Minimal errors of spelling, typing, grammar, format, sequencing – none of which detract from the reader’s understanding.	<i>Mechanics:</i> No errors in use of APA guidelines or other assigned style requirements. No errors of spelling, typing, grammar, format, sequencing.	
		<i>Organization and Coherence:</i> Numerous instances of inaccurate and/or insufficient information. Little or no expression about the relationships among professional literature, theory, philosophy, research methodology, research findings, and current practice. Contains extraneous information. Multiple problems in clarity of expression.	<i>Organization and Coherence:</i> Few or no instances of inaccurate information. Sufficient information in all sections. Clear expression about the relationships among professional literature, theory, philosophy, research methodology, research findings, and current practice. Little or no extraneous information. Few or no problems in clarity of expression.	<i>Organization and Coherence:</i> The quality of content, organization, and coherence of the writing is at the level expected of professional publications.	

Elements	Relationship to Conceptual Framework	Unacceptable (U)	Acceptable (A)	Target (T)	Final Score
Final Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Knowledgeable ▪ Reflective ▪ Collaborative ▪ Leaders 	<p><i>Content:</i> Presentation does not reflect use of coaching and feedback from committee member(s) on earlier draft(s). Presentation has significant errors or omissions. Does not use appropriate professional literature or research findings to respond to questions.</p>	<p><i>Content:</i> Presentation reflects use of coaching and feedback from committee member(s) on earlier draft(s). There are few errors or omissions; none are significant. Uses appropriate professional literature or research findings to respond to questions.</p>	<p><i>Content and Delivery:</i> Presentation is of the quality that is expected at a regional or national professional conference. Serves as an instructional model for other candidates.</p>	
		<p><i>Delivery:</i> Does not follow a logical sequence of presentation of content. Paces the sections of the presentation inappropriately and does not adhere to the time limit. Does not demonstrate poise, confidence, and/or audience awareness.</p>	<p><i>Delivery:</i> Follows a logical sequence of presentation of content. Paces the sections of the presentation appropriately and adheres to the time limit. Demonstrates poise, confidence, and audience awareness.</p>		