

# Senior Thesis: Putting it Together



## **essential understandings:**

**Action research** is **research** that calls for a reflective process of progressive problem solving led by individuals working with others in teams or as part of a "community of practice" to improve the way they address issues and solve problems.

**“The clever man will tell you what he knows; he may even try to explain it to you. The wise man encourages you to discover it for yourself, even though he knows it inside out.”**

***Revans (1980), quoted in Action Research, Principles and Practice, McNiff, 1988, 52***

## **overview**

Working on a large scale problem calls for different problem solving strategies. Action Research is a researcher-led approach to improve an organization, process, community or to solve a specific problem. This is exciting, because it means YOU are responsible for your learning in Action Research. What is important? Why is it important? The focus and scope of this project is determined by you! While working in your internships, you will focus on collecting data to use in a semester long Action Research project. It will be similar in nature to a research paper, but more involved. By the end of the year, you will be able to have identified a specific research question, provided insight into how to answer this question, and implemented your plan with your internship provider. You will be using data you collected as evidence to back up your claims.

## **guiding questions:**

How can I ensure my final project is professional and correct?

How can I develop my oratorical skills to give a good presentation in front of my family and friends?

## **lessons**

- Outline-End
- Self Evaluation
- Presentation
- Reflecting on Research
- Evidence based claims
- Oratorical SKills

## **group work**

Students should understand that Action Research calls for group collaboration in many ways, they should be prepared to help each other understand the process, and carry out their projects. Working with your peers when called for, as well as focusing and working independently when needed will both count as part of a daily participation grade.

## **individual work**

1. The Story of My Action Research Project Due 4/3
2. Further Reflection and Continuing Questions about My Action Research Journey Due 4/7
3. 1st Presentation of your ARP Due 4/28
4. Draft 1 ARP Due 4/21
5. Second Draft ARP with peer edits/review Due 4/28
6. Dress Rehearsal ARP TBD
7. Presentation of your ARP TBD

Each section of the outline (Introduction, Context, etc) should be at LEAST one paragraph long. Be specific, and explain all parts of your project. Refer back to the specific outline directions on classroom (or below) for all parts of your paper.

## **assessment due 6/1**

A Socratic Dialogue on the following topics, bring responses and be ready to discuss:

How has Action Research changed your perspective on education?

How has the independence of Action Research changed your views on school?

What do you think the future of Action Research is?

## **readings**

<http://www.dailycal.org/2015/02/06/survey-senior-theses/>

## **links**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXhOZmFID4c>

<http://evokedevelopment.com/uploads/blog/commonData.pdf>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3WHMPZ6WaiY>

Outline Instructions:

Abstract

- Introduction
- What I've Learned from Distant Colleagues (also referred to as the Literature Review or the Theoretical Framework)
- Clarifying My Action Research Project
- The Road Map of My Action Research Project
- The Story of My Action Research Project
- Further Reflection and Continuing Questions about My Action Research Journey
- References
- Appendices

Abstract

The abstract consists of a single, concise paragraph describing the purpose, procedure and results of your study. Use no more than 200 words. Don't write the abstract until you are nearly finished writing, and then draft and redraft until it reads as is as clearly as possible.

## Introduction

The goal of this section is to combine information about the setting of the action research project and the story behind the project into a smooth narrative that gets the reader engaged in your work's context; the critical question is also introduced here. This section is usually about three to five pages long. The reader should have a good idea what the paper is about before finishing the first page. In the introduction, be cognizant of the following:

- **Context.** It is important to communicate to the reader a clear picture of the overall context of your AR project. The way you write the beginning of your paper lays the foundation (weak or strong) for the credibility and trustworthiness of your results and conclusions.
- **Use storytelling.** Instead of telling about your setting, illustrate it for the reader using stories and anecdotes taken from your notes, reflections, and data. Introduce major players in your analysis and results.
- **Include active and layered description.** Use multiple data sources to illustrate the setting and story behind the research. It must be clear to the reader that you are thoroughly immersed and engaged in your setting, and are therefore qualified to make credible analyses and interpretations. By referring to some data here you signal to the reader prior to the rest of the paper what type of research this is and how data were generally collected.
- **Your story.** It is also important to communicate to the reader a clear picture of yourself as the student teacher-researcher and how your own biases and experiences, and assumptions not only influence the study but also provided the fodder for your critical question. This may be woven into your illustration of context by including your own thoughts and memories. If there are key quotes that tell your story in another's words, consider including the quote in this section. Make it clear how you arrived at your critical question.
- **Your critical question.** Bring your narrative to a climax in which you lay out your critical question in detail. Explain briefly what your action(s) consisted of. Tell briefly what your conclusions look like (don't try to keep the reader in suspense).

## What I've Learned from Distant Colleagues

The goal of this section is to introduce the reader to the major issues and/or themes learned from distant colleagues in the literature surrounding your critical question. By broadening your readers' understanding of the major issues surrounding your research, you further solidify the credibility and trustworthiness of your work. This section is generally about three to five pages long.

We find it is best to organize this section in one of two ways: either group the literature you are reviewing by themes or review the literature to provide an overview of the history leading up to the framework for your AR project. For example, one of our students organized her literature review according to these themes: (1) literature on the effectiveness of reading aloud; (2) strategies for increasing reading fluency and comprehension; and (3) meaningful reading fluency and comprehension assessment strategies. Another student organized her literature review as a historical overview of assessment in mathematics. Her review looked at the evolution of mathematical assessments to its present emphasis on problem-solving.

Choose a format that will allow your readers to make the connection between your literature review and the AR study by establishing the theoretical foundation of the action, curriculum review, self-study, or ethnography you later describe in your AR paper.

Note: This section will contain the majority of your citations, although we suggest bringing in the voices of distant colleagues throughout your paper.

### Clarifying My Action Research Project

This is a brief, concise one-page section focusing your reader on the essential elements of your AR project. Assume a more professional style and tone to answer precisely:

- who is involved in the project;
- what the critical question is and what was implemented or analyzed;
- where the project took place (description of setting);
- when the data collection occurred (dates of implementation and/or data collection, length of study);
- how data collection was completed (brief statements – the next section details this information);
- why you conducted the study;
- limitations of the study.

This section may seem redundant given that you have already revealed your critical question (CQ) and action(s) earlier. The intent here is to clearly focus your reader and to use a technical, professional tone that defines the study before the reader begins the story of your research.

### The Roadmap of My Action Research Project

The goal of this section is to inform your reader about the following:

- the interventions, analysis, or strategies you implemented;
- the data collection strategies and sources you used;
- the contents of the data sets you collected;
- the methods you used to analyze, interpret, and deconstruct the data;
- changes you made in your research design.

This section should be three to five pages long. Continue the professional tone of the “Clarifying My Action Research Project.” The Roadmap section is a technical piece of the paper in which the reader gets an inside view of your research process. The idea here is that someone else could do the same research in their classroom by following your detailed descriptions of methodology.

### The Story of My Action Research Project

The goal of this section is to illustrate what you have learned as related to your critical question. Use your data to tell the story of your research and support your conclusions and emerging theories. This section is the heart and soul of your action research paper. This is where you tell your story. The section is rich in voice, style, and data. Remember the writing advice: show, don't tell as you write. Interweave important data into your narrative. Include tables, charts, and quotes from interviews and your observations and reflections. Use your data to illustrate your ideas, and to provide the reader the freedom to draw his/her

own conclusions as well. Explain how you interpret your data. Support your interpretations with examples. Use multiple data sources to support major assertions or ideas. Include multiple voices and perspectives, including those of critical colleagues, students, and “distant mentors” (literature review). Deconstruct your work, providing counterexamples and alternative interpretations.

### Further Reflection and Continuing Questions about My Action Research Journey

In this section, you bring themes together and begin the process of concluding your paper. Consider the following questions as writing prompts for this final reflection of your action research journey:

- What are some of the most important lessons you will take into your teaching career?
- What will you do differently next time?
- What additional questions did this research project pose for you?
- What was your action research journey like? How has this journey transformed your image of teacher, teaching, students, schools, learning? How have your paradigms been altered, confirmed, and/or challenged?
- What have you learned about action research? How has your definition of AR changed? How do you see yourself using this process in the future?

### How to Write a Memorable Conclusion

Conclusions are tough: how do you end a good date, or say goodbye after a long visit? More than likely, you will write your concluding paragraph several times before you are satisfied. An effective way to write the concluding paragraph is to use a quote, either from someone famous, your students, other participants, or from your own researcher’s notebook. Another possibility is to end with a short story, a vignette, from your data that illustrates the central focus of the study. Sometimes, a combination works well.

In the example below, the student teacher had conducted an action research project about homework. In his classroom, students either did not turn in homework or they turned in poor quality homework. He attempted two different kinds of homework strategies to improve both quality and completion rates. However, he found that a reward system which gave students “free time” points for turning in homework regardless of quality, trumped all his other homework strategies. This is how he concluded his piece:

To conclude my research I decided to ask the entire class one question. “Would you rather earn homework points by turning in an assignment that you know you could do better on or sacrifice the homework points but get the best score in the class on a big assignment?” Seventy-six percent of the class said they would choose the homework points. Only six of the 25 students polled would take the top score. Students are getting mixed messages. They’re motivated to get the homework points even though we want them to produce their best work. They’re motivated by the wrong thing; completing assignments no matter what the quality is. Absolutely, they still struggle to complete their work, but they do understand that completing work is what is valued regardless of the quality. More than anything else, I’ve learned that students are smart. They learn early on in the school year what is important, and most students strive to achieve that. As a teacher, I need to be aware of this and careful not to send a message to my students that I don’t want them to receive. Students will provide us with the information we need to create the types of classrooms we want if we look for it. I credit the students for teaching me the lessons that I will take from this action research project, one of which is summarized by this quote, “The question educators need to ask is not how motivated their students are, but how their students are motivated” (Kohn, 1994, p. 3).

This conclusion returns to the heart of the action research study. It summarizes the main lesson the student teacher/researcher learned. And, it encourages the reader to ask, "What kind of mixed messages do I send to my students?" This makes for a memorable final curtain call!

## References

Consult carefully with APA guidelines, or whatever other citation methods required in your program, to ensure that references are done correctly. References are yet another element of trustworthiness. Plagiarism is not only legally and ethically wrong; it cheapens the quality of your journey. Attend to references carefully.

## Appendices

A writer places in the appendices additional information that supports or illustrates points in the paper. Items in the appendices allow the reader to go deeper or gain a clearer view of what is being said in the main text. Appendices are important but they are not a "dumping ground." For example, not all data goes in the appendices; however, a log of data sets may be appropriate. Not all student work would be placed in the appendices, but a sample that clarifies an assignment would be appropriate.

Possible inclusions in the appendices include:

- a log of data sets or specific items from a data set;
- assessments;
- surveys, questionnaires, and interview questions;
- letters home (including how you gained permissions);
- lesson plans;
- artifacts.

Note that anything placed in the appendices must be referenced in the text of the paper. Check the appropriate citation guidelines on how to do this.