EDCS 812: Principles of Action Research

Term: Summer 2021 (June 21 – July 31)
Time/Location: Asynchronous/Blackboard

Welcome to the Course!

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Due to the asynchronous nature of our online program, which serves students across multiple time zones, my office hours are virtual and by appointment only. Although I reserve the right not to respond to e-mail over the weekend, I am otherwise very prompt. Students should never hesitate to reach out!

Course Description:

Per the Graduate Studies Bulletin, this course guides students through *introductory analysis, interpretation, and systematic study, using action research methodology, of a significant question or issue related to teaching, administration in K-12 schools, higher education, and/or other social institutions.* As the first of two courses focused on action research, EDCS 812 establishes a foundation for EDCS 813, and both courses support students along the path to a successful Dissertation in Practice (DiP) for an Ed.D. in Educational Practice and Innovation.

Goal: to recognize, understand, and feel capable of producing high-quality action research.

Learning Objectives:

Upon completing this course, students will be able to:
- Discuss underlying theories of action research (also known as practitioner/teacher research/inquiry) and explain how and why it differs from "traditional" education research.
- Demonstrate how key elements of action research (e.g., Problem of Practice, positionality, theoretical framework) operate, especially in relation to a Dissertation in Practice.
- Apply a working definition of action research to critically evaluate real-world examples.
- Identify one or more potential Problems of Practice (PoPs) and compose a related positionality statement, aligned with a tentative purpose statement and research questions.
- Develop a partial prospectus that can serve as a basis for Chapter 1 of the DiP.

Equity Statement:

EDCS 812 requires the same commitment to equity expected of all EdD students in the curriculum studies concentration. As a reminder, incoming students sign the following pledge:

> As we renew our commitment to social justice, the Curriculum Studies faculty embrace the College of Education's vision and mission to manifest these tenets in multiple ways. In particular, we want to ensure you emerge from your EdD experience prepared to function as an education activist in your professional position by addressing issues of diversity, equity, and inclusivity, especially by countering racism and anti-Blackness in schools and communities. This has long been a commitment of the Curriculum Studies program, and we write to reinforce this emphasis, your role in its actualization, and our commitment to foregrounding these goals across our program.
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> Our collaboration with the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) has also supported our work to define and enact principles that drive activism through the EdD degree program (Becton et al., 2020). The Curriculum Studies program faculty have defined activism as choosing to engage in service to, for, and/or with others for the purpose of promoting equity to improve the lived experience of a group or an individual. The CPED Framework and Design Principles further guide the Curriculum Studies program's commitment to social justice and obligation to eradicate racism and anti-Blackness in education through the reaffirmation of the first and third guiding principles of the CPED Framework:
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> > *The leadership of CPED stands in solidarity with Black and Brown communities, and we grieve with them for the injustices they have and continue to face. ...equity, justice, and ethics [form] the first principle upon which EdD programs should be designed to prepare educational leaders. The third CPED principle focuses on teaching educational leaders "to develop and demonstrate collaboration and communication skills to work with diverse communities and to build partnerships." We must make th[ese] principles a priority in our programs if we are to provide our practitioners with transformational skills. (CPED, 2019)*
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> As curriculum leaders, we are indeed fortunate to be able to assist each other and the students we teach so we all grow in ways that can lead to a better tomorrow. We have an immense capacity to positively influence curriculum on many levels and welcome you into the process.

References

Becton, Y., Bogiages, C., Currin, E., D'Amico, L., Jeffries, R., Lilly, T., & Tamim, S. (2020). An emerging framework for the EdD activist. *Impacting Education: Journal on Transforming Professional Practice*, *5*(2), 43–54. https://impactinged.pitt.edu/ojs/index.php/ImpactingEd/article/view/131

Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate. (2019). *CPED framework*. https://cped.memberclicks.net/assets/resource-center/docs/cped_framework.pdf

Support Services:

Online students may never set foot on campus, but they should be aware and take advantage of various services provided to all UofSC students, including but not limited to:
- Disability Resource Center https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/student_disability_resource_center/index.php
- Library Services https://www.sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/university_libraries/index.php
- Personal Account Preferences (including pronouns) https://myaccount.sc.edu/iam/

Required Textbooks:

Efron, S. E., & Ravid, R. (2020). *Action research in education: A practical guide* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press. — ISBN: 978-1-4625-4162-1 *This is also available as a [library e-book](), and/or students may purchase the 1st edition (2013), which has the same chapter organization.

Herr, K., & Anderson, G. L. (2015). *The action research dissertation: A guide for students and faculty* (2nd ed.). Sage. — ISBN: 978-1-4833-3310-6

Supplemental Texts: (available as PDFs on Blackboard—additional texts TBD by student interest)

Belzer, A., & Ryan, S. (2013). Defining the problem of practice dissertation: Where's the practice, what's the problem? *Planning & Changing*, *44*(3/4), 195–207. https://education.illinoisstate.edu/planning/articles/vol44.php

Dana, N. F. (2013). *Digging deeper into action research: A teacher inquirer's field guide*. Corwin. [Chapter 2]

Dana, N. F. (2015). Understanding inquiry as stance: Illustration and analysis of one teacher researcher's work. *LEARNing Landscapes*, *8*(2), 161–171. https://doi.org/10.36510/learnland.v8i2.702

Grant, C., & Osanloo, A. (2014). Understanding, selecting, and integrating a theoretical framework in dissertation research: Creating the blueprint for your 'house.' *Administrative Issues Journal: Connecting Education, Practice, and Research*, *4*(2), 12–26. https://doi.org/10.5929/2014.4.2.9

Ma, V. W., Dana, N. F., Adams, A., & Kennedy, B. L. (2018). Understanding the Problem of Practice: An analysis of professional practice EdD dissertations. *Impacting Education*, *3*(1), 13–22. https://doi.org/10.5195/ie.2018.50

Rust, F. O., & Meyers, E. (2003). How we do action research. In E. Meyers & F. O. Rust (Eds.), *Taking action with teacher research* (pp. 1–16). Heinemann.

Required Technology:

Online students obviously need a computer with reliable Internet, so completing assignments on time may occasionally require going to a library or public WiFi hotspot. Students are expected to check e-mail and Blackboard daily and should demonstrate basic technical proficiency (e.g., organizing and saving electronic files, downloading and uploading documents). Students with technology questions or concerns should contact the [Division of Information Technology]() (DoIT) Service Desk or submit a request through the [Self-Service Portal]().

Expected Netiquette:

Established standards of online behavior (i.e., "netiquette") promote a safe and productive online environment. The following is a brief list of expectations for members of our learning community:

1. Consider your tone: treat others with respect, especially when different opinions arise.
2. Ensure your questions and comments are relevant to the discussion topics.
3. Avoid using all-caps, which can come across as aggressive or impolite.
4. Before you send/submit, proofread your grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
5. Do not procrastinate, especially when the timing of your discussion posts has an impact on your peers' learning.
6. Adhere to the university's standards for [academic integrity]().

Grades:

Students can earn up to 300 points via **Discussions** (5 x 25 points = 125), a **Reflective Journal** (3 entries x 25 points = 75), and a **Partial Prospectus** (100 points). Final grades will reflect the following scale:

A (275 – 300 points)
B (250 – 274)
C (225 – 249)
D (200 – 224)
F (199 and below)

The following assignment overview elaborates on how to earn grades in this course. Due to the accelerated pace of EdD courses, I also reserve the right to deduct points (1/day) for late assignments. Juggling late work on top of other tasks may hinder students' success, so if extenuating circumstances arise, students should reach out as soon as possible to negotiate a proactive solution.

Assignments:

Readings: Each week, students will read book chapters, articles, and/or dissertations to prepare for discussions. This may require reading *before* the week is underway, and I will provide additional guidance in periodic announcements. Although reading assignments are not graded, *per se*, they are integral to success on writing assignments. Students should annotate the texts, construct a running bibliography, or employ some other method of sense-making to hone and refine their scholarly skills.

Discussions (25 points each x 5 discussions = 125 points, based on content, format, and timeliness): Discussions generally require 3 types of posts, outlined below, although students may exceed the required number, especially when seeking to include every member of the learning community. The ***Critical Feedback Cycle*** is a special discussion (with an extended timeline) in which a small group of community members exchanges portions of their writing and shares critical feedback for improvement. This has two primary benefits: 1) each *writer* receives more in-depth feedback than I alone could provide to the entire class and 2) each *reader* can apply new learning in an authentic way. Grades for the cycle operate as with any other discussion, which provides low-stakes preparation for the final paper. I will assess discussions as follows:

- **Original Post (10 points, usually due Thursday)**: Exemplary Original Posts address all points of discussion required by the prompt (which appear in bold on Blackboard), integrate those points in a cohesive and succinct way (i.e., adhering to the paragraph limits in the prompt), and include critical questions or reflection to promote authentic discussion. When students reference an outside source, they should use APA format, both in-text and in a References list at the end of the post. This expectation may feel a bit restrictive in an online discussion forum, but high-quality Original Posts (in part or in sum) could eventually be incorporated in a student's final paper and/or dissertation.

- **Guided Responses (10 points, usually due Saturday)**: Exemplary Guided Responses synthesize ideas from a student's Original Post with those raised by at least two classmates. These tend to be slightly shorter but still substantive posts at 5 points each. Responses raise new questions, share personal experiences, and/or

include new resources to expand the conversation while maintaining a focus on action research. If an Original Post poses questions, students should respond in a way that promotes discussion rather than from a position of authority.

- **Replies (5 points, usually due Monday)**: Exemplary engagement requires students to consider their classmates' responses to their Original Post. Students do not have to respond to *all* ideas raised in the original thread but should acknowledge peers' contributions and reflect on key take-aways. Replies tend to be the shortest, least formal posts—students can even opt for video instead of text—yet they play an important role by stimulating reflection and reinforcing social ties within our learning community.

Reflective Journal (25 points/entry x 3 entries = 75 points, based on completion): Assessed more holistically than other assignments, the journal enables students to share their current understanding of action research, pose questions to extend their learning, and offer actionable feedback on the course. Blackboard's journal tool permits students to engage in 1-on-1, continuous dialogue with me at their own pace, provided they complete **at least 3 entries by the end of Module 4**. To make the most of this assignment, students should not wait until Week 5 to begin!

Partial Prospectus (100 points, based on a 10-point rubric on Blackboard): The final paper enables students to demonstrate their learning in a way that will be useful as they move forward in the program. As a *Partial* Prospectus, this is *not* a "Chapter 1" and does *not* lock students into a dissertation topic. Rather, the goal is for students to showcase their knowledge of the principles of action research by applying them to their own authentic Problems of Practice. Extensive guidelines and a detailed rubric provided on Blackboard are intended to ensure students' success on this major assignment, which builds on smaller assignments throughout EDCS 812.

Course Design:

This course is an asynchronous online course and will not require any face-to-face (F2F) or synchronous meetings. We will begin and end with Module 1 to mirror the cyclical nature of action research. Based on student feedback, each week will run Tuesday – Monday, with the exception of Week 1 (Monday – Monday) and Week 6 (Tuesday – Saturday), owing to the start and end dates for the course. This rhythm enables students to juggle graduate school with their dual roles as full-time practitioners. This is usually less of a concern for a summer term, but condensing the course from 8 to 6 weeks brings its own challenge. In any case, students cannot expect to relegate *all* graduate school work to the weekends, but this structure provides some flexibility to make the most of limited free time. Note the trade-off in this design: as the instructor, I reserve the right to treat my role as a full-time Monday – Friday job. I will do my best to keep an eye on e-mail over the weekend but may not be as responsive during my own "off" time.

On a related note, some students are motivated to work ahead of schedule whenever they can, but the structure of this course occasionally provides some "stop signs" to reinforce the value of socially constructed learning. That is, much of the learning will occur via the discussion board, where students engage with the texts and fellow classmates (and me!) to internalize and apply the principles of action research. Students must find the balance between making constant forward progress (i.e., checking off items on a to-do list) and pausing to reflect on their learning. To facilitate that process, I will provide prompt feedback on assignments (generally within 48 hours).

This calendar lists the topic and timing of each module, along with the key tasks in bold. Additional guidelines and support are available on Blackboard. Periodic announcements will also reinforce the intentional, cumulative structure of the course.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	JUNE 21 MODULE 1: *Who & Where We Are as Action Researchers*	22 **Course Survey due**	23 **Week 1 reading**: syllabus; Efron & Ravid Ch. 1; Herr & Anderson Ch. 1–2	24 **Discussion 1.1 (Original Post due)**	25	26 **Discussion 1.1 (Guided Responses due)**
27	28 **Discussion 1.1 (Replies due)**	29 MODULE 2: *The What & Why of Action Research*	30 **Week 2 reading**: E & R Ch. 3; H & A Ch. 4; supplemental text TBD	JULY 1 **Discussion 2.0 (OP due)**	2	3 **Discussion 2.0 (GR due)**
4	5 **Discussion 2.0 (Rs due)**	6 MODULE 3: *How to Do Action Research, Part 1*	7 **Week 3 reading**: E & R Ch. 2; H & A Ch. 3; suppl. texts (Belzer & Ryan; Ma et al.)	8 *Note*: Week 3 reading also includes independently selected texts TBD	9	10
11	12 **Discussion 3.0 – *Critical Feedback Cycle* (OP due)**	13	14 **Week 4 reading**: supplemental texts (Dana, 2013; Rust & Meyers)	15 *Note*: Week 4 reading also includes critical friends' drafts	16	17 **Discussion 3.0 (GRs due)**
18	19 **Discussion 3.0 (Rs due)**	20 MODULE 4: *How to Do Action Research, Part 2*	21 **Week 5 reading**: E & R Ch. 4; H & A Ch. 5; suppl. text (Grant & Osanloo); DiP TBD	22 **Discussion 4.0 – *Dissertation Review* (OP due)**	23	24 **Discussion 4.0 (GR due)**
25	26 **Disc. 4.0 (Rs due) & Reflective Journal due** (3 entries minimum from Weeks 1–5)	27 **Week 6 reading**: supplemental text (Dana, 2015) & accompanying video	28 **Partial Prospectus due**	29 **Discussion 1.2 (OP due)**	30 **Course Evaluation due**	31 **Discussion 1.2 (GRs due; *Rs optional*)**