

Course Syllabus



Introduction to Action Research Methods (IL 2405)

Syllabus Fall 2023

Instructor Information:

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Introduction

Welcome to Action Research. In this course, we will think together about how we can use action research to examine our teaching practice using systematic inquiry over time. Action research gives practitioners (like yourselves!) an opportunity to critically examine your practice and consider how and why you might shift or change how you practice in light of what you learn through data collection, analysis, and synthesis of empirical research and theory. Over the term, we will learn how action research is defined, how it is carried out, and its relationship to other qualitative research methodologies. Your final assignment is an action research project proposal on a topic relevant to your practice.

*Note: For those of you who are not in a traditional teaching role, we will think together about how to apply action research to your site of practice.

What will we do together?

Together we will:

- Examine how action research can support your practice
- Develop a research design that includes an overarching question and strategies and rationale for data collection, analysis, and synthesis

- Conduct pilot data collection and preliminary analyses
- Write a literature review and use it to contextualize your preliminary findings
- Develop an action research proposal that you can use in your site of practice

What will we know together?

Together, we will examine how action research can be a liberatory practice in classroom contexts that leverages the everyday practices of noticing and reflecting, to make productive change. We will interrogate who gets to produce scholarly knowledge and how action research can be an avenue for practitioners to build on their everyday theoretical work and further explore the relationships between theory and practice. We will explore how to engage in caring and ethical action research design that helps us to pose and answer research questions to further improve the material conditions of the people in our learning contexts.

How will we engage in teaching and learning about action research?

In this class, we will write a great deal. Writing in this class is to nurture critical thinking. Writing is also a process. Expect to rewrite, and revise. When we do both of these things, we rethink, and think more deeply about what we are trying to communicate. Thinking about writing as a process will also allow us to continue to reflect on conceptual ideas, theories, and the data we are collecting. Indeed, the role of empirical research (e.g. qualitative or quantitative studies) as well as theory (e.g. social theory, learning theories), is to help you *locate* your research questions and findings in the broader research conversations. Tracking back and forth between what others have learned and what we are noticing in our everyday practice, will deepen our interpretations of practice. To that end, we will also give and get feedback on our ideas from our peers. Think about your peers as providing windows into your work – they will see/interpret your ideas in ways that you don't anticipate, this will help you rethink and examine how you are conceptualizing and communicating your ideas. Finally, we will grapple with the idea that data comes in multiple forms and from multiple sources. In our practitioner view, data might include conversations with students before class that we jot down in our research notebook, observations, student artifacts, assessments, documents or resources we create for pedagogical purposes. IT can also include things like photographs of children processes, a video of a moment, resources you use that you want to analyze further, etc.

Another way to think about this:

1. writing is thinking; rewriting is thinking more deeply
2. research writing is an iterative process
3. research literature and theory helps us to deepen and contextualize our arguments
4. peer feedback can help us see what is no longer obvious to us about our own ideas
5. we are always engaged in praxis: in other words, our everyday practice is deeply theoretical
6. data is multimodal, can be informal (e.g. random chat before/after class) and formal (e.g. interview), and can come from multiple sources (e.g. photographs, assessments), and not all data is quantitative! In fact, lots of it isn't!

Course Texts

In this course you will read a range of multimodal texts including academic journal articles, blogs, book chapters, podcasts, and videos. Most weeks I will also record a short weekly overview video.

We will also read several chapters from the book, *Teacher Action Research* (Pine, 2008) and *Becoming a Teacher Through Action Research* (Phillips & Carr, 2014). APA citations are below.

You do not have to purchase these texts. For our class purposes, I have PDF versions of the necessary chapters located in the respective Canvas modules. **(Please note that you should not distribute these PDFs, they are meant to only be used for class purposes. Sharing them violates copyright policies).**

- Pine, G. J. (2008). *Teacher action research: Building knowledge democracies*. Sage.
- Phillips, D. K., & Carr, K. (2014). *Becoming a teacher through action research: Process, context, and self-study*. New York, NY: Routledge.
ISBN: 978-0-415-66049-5 (3rd Edition)

Some resources on APA citation style:

[OWL Purdue site](#) 

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/general_forma

[Pitt APA Resource site](#)  <https://pitt.libguides.com/citationhelp/apa7>

Finally, as a way to support your learning and proficiency with using PittCat and the embedded search engines accessible via our library system, you will also be searching for and reading texts relevant to your research projects.

Coursework

This course consists of ongoing reflective research praxis activities (I) and three larger milestone assignments (II) [see table below]. The following is an articulation of how assignments are structured and how how grading will be assigned. However, I want to underscore that as I move continually away from traditional grading, my goal is to support your learning journey- I am looking for growth, development over time, critical thinking, introspection, and meaningful attention to the work that is rooted in your inquiry.

COURSEWORK	POINT VALUE	PERCENTAGE OF FINAL GRADE
Research Praxis (e.g. discussion posts, researcher journal, peer collab work, social annotation via Perusall).	30	30%
Researcher Identity Memo [I]	15	15%
Think Piece & Annotated Bibliography [II]	25	25%
Action Research Proposal [III]	30	30%
Total	100	100%

Table 1- Grading / Structure of assignments

Research Praxis

In this class, your online participation is critical. Research praxis assignments include your researcher journal (see below), discussion posts, collaborative participation you do on Canvas or other digital platforms (e.g. Padlet, MURAL), and also includes peer feedback and comments. Regarding peer feedback, we will use different ways of giving feedback (e.g. the criteria for research questions or structures on good research design). At other times, we will use the commonly practiced, *I like, I wish, I wonder* protocol which is further described in assignments.

Researcher Journal

For this class:

- You will keep an electronic journal where you document your responses to the detailed prompts that are posted on Canvas, the textbook exercises, and your research writing on your topic.
- Copy the full prompts from Canvas into your own respective journals and respond to your questions there. Make sure you also include the date.
- Each week, you will be asked to share either excerpts of your journal and/or a syntheses of your responses to individual prompts to engage in class dialogue and receive peer feedback on your thinking/ understanding.
- At the end of the semester, your full journal will be turned in along with your final action research proposal, so make sure you are responding to all the prompts along the way.

- You can respond to journal prompts anyway that makes sense (e.g. lists, bullets, prose) but can also include diagrams, concept maps, etc. Some of these things I'll be supporting you to do as well. Also, if sometimes it's easier to write by hand/ draw by hand, just take a photograph and include those in your journal that way.

You could use tools like (but not limited to): Evernote, Google docs, Google Keep, Microsoft OneNote, Notion.

You will keep a researcher journal for the entire course. An essential component to action research is the reflective practice you need to cultivate. Writing about your experiences, questions, quandaries, and what you do or do not notice, are important to document in-the-moment. *Be sure to date all of your entries.* In qualitative research the role of note taking and memoing supports researchers' ability to trace threads across time, see how their thinking evolves, and ensure that they document experiences as they happen. In our course, you will use the journal to reflect on broader questions about the materials and ideas of the course, document your observations or experiences in your respective classes/contexts, and document ongoing questions. Some of the journal entries will be structured in that you will respond to specific prompts. In other cases, you might opt to document thoughts that aren't specific to an assignment but help you reflect on your research journey. You will turn in your researcher journal with your final action research proposal.

Milestone Assignments

Researcher Identity Memo | DUE November 1, 2023, 11:59PM

This memo is a first step in thinking about your positionality in relation to the research context. The reason this is important is because your beliefs significantly influence your understanding of the phenomena you are trying to study. The memo will consider questions like: How did you come to form your beliefs about teaching and learning? How do you 'see' the world and believe what you believe? What implications does that have for your everyday practice?


To write this memo, your first step will be to respond to a series of questions that are adapted from Phillips & Carr (2014) in your journal. The second step will be to analyze those responses, look at the peer feedback you receive, and then write a memo that helps reveal who you are, your principles or perspectives, and what the broader connections are to your research topic of interest. (See Canvas for more details).

For example, in the first researcher positionality statement I wrote many years ago, I realized that my high school leadership experiences like being student director of the school play and the editor of the literary magazine, led me to start thinking about the value and potential of 'making to learn.' I was always situated in learning experiences (outside of the traditional classroom) that taught me a great deal about

how I learned best, and this continues to shape my worldview. Thus, in this memo, I might trace how these ideas came to inform my teaching praxis today.

Annotated Bibliography and Think Piece | DUE NOVEMBER 26, 2023 11:59PM EST

A second way that our worldviews can change or be shifted or expanded is to learn from others. In Phillips & Carr (2014) they refer to this as learning from 'distant colleagues.' In this class, we will work on using library resources to identify research that is meaningful to our research questions, explore how best to critically interrogate an academic text (e.g. scholarly journal article), and finally use research to bolster arguments and help refine our thinking. Thus, you will engage in two distinct but related components: 1) creating an annotated bibliography 2) writing a think piece that builds on the literature you have identified.

1. **Annotated Bibliography:** for this part of the assignment you will read and analyze at least 5 texts related to your area of focus/research question. Three of them must be from scholarly journals and report on empirical research, the other two pieces can be book chapters, blogs (e.g. Edutopia, National Writing Project), or practitioner-facing publications (e.g. Phi Delta Kappan). For each piece, you will synthesize 1) the context 2) key findings 3) connections to your area of focus 4) gaps or questions. The goal is to help you gather resources that help you start to understand your topic and look at themes that cut across the research. You will use [APA citation style](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/general_formatting.html)  [\(https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/general_formatting.html\)](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/general_formatting.html).
2. **Think Piece:** Once you have the articles reviewed, you will think about the articles and your research question/area of focus. In this piece, you will articulate your interest in pursuing the research question, how it's connected to your practice, what you hope to learn from your project, and what (so far) you understand the literature to be saying about your question. You should write this in your own voice, but weave in quotes or ideas from the texts to help build your argument. We will look at some examples together to get a sense of how to construct these. The most important piece here is for you to see how your questions about your practice are connected to ongoing research and how your site of practice can offer new ways of knowing/looking at the research.

Action Research Proposal | DUE DECEMBER 10, 2023 11:59PM

Your final project in this course is an action research proposal. The proposal should be 10-15 pages max in length and include an appendix for artifacts (e.g. interview guide, observation protocol). The goal of this assignment is for you to create a research design that you could turn around and use in your site of practice. **I encourage you to build upon the writing you have already done in previous assignments, in Canvas discussion posts, and in your researcher journal.** This is an artifact that will represent thinking and critical analysis you have done throughout the course.

The action research proposal will include these key areas:

- **Introduction**, which will build on the story of your question – why am I interested in pursuing this research question? How is it related to my context?
- **Conceptual Framing**, what is my positionality in relation to this context? What theories or world view explain how I see the world? What do I believe about how knowledge is constructed and who can create it? (e.g. social theories, learning theories, theories of literacies, and so on)
- **Literature review**, what have other scholars already come to know about my question? What are the common findings/themes or even gaps in the research? Where does my research fit within this broader context?
- **Methods**, this is the heart of the research design. What is my site? My context? What data will I collect and why? How will I analyze it? how will I triangulate the data? will my research design actually answer my research question?
- **Connections to Practice**: How will finding pursuing this research question connect back to my practice? What do I hope to understand? How do I see action research fitting into my future work?

See assignment for further details on the assignment and grading rubric.

For this assignment, you will also complete a self-assessment using the grading rubric I use to evaluate your final project.