Course Syllabus

Edit

Introduction to Action Research (TLL 2405)

Syllabus Fall 2025

Instructor Information:

Dr. Veena Vasudevan, Assistant Professor of Digital Media and Learning

Office: WW Posvar Hall 5131 | **Phone**: 412-383-0297 | **Email:** veenav@pitt.edu (mailto:veenav@pitt.edu)

Schedule virtual office hours: https://pathways.campus.eab.com/pal/o3AqBTfKfo (https://pathways.campus.eab.com/pal/o3AqBTfKfo)

Introduction

Welcome to Introduction to Action Research Methods. In this course, we will think together about how we can use research to examine our teaching practice using systematic inquiry over time. 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 research is defined, how it is carried out, and its relationship to other qualitative research methodologies. Your final assignment is a research proposal relevant to your site of 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 research proposal that you can use in your classroom/ 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 write and rewrite we think more deeply about what we are trying to communicate. Writing is an iterative process. Research writing requires us to write while considering 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.

We will do a great deal of reading as well, reading collectively - through social annotation, as well as 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 share overview videos, these are **required texts**.

We will also read several chapters from the book, *Teacher Action Research (Pine, 2008), Becoming a Teacher Through Action Research* (Phillips & Carr, 2014), and we may also look at some chapters from *Introduction to Intersectional Qualitative Research* (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022). 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)
- Esposito, J., & Evans-Winters, V. (2021). Introduction to intersectional qualitative research. SAGE Publications, Incorporated.

Two 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 grades 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.*

The goal of these assignments is for you to try out ideas, explore conceptual and theoretical ideas, and to be in dialogue with peers. The assignments related to milestones will also be where I support you (as well as your peers) in shaping your final research proposal as several of these assignments will contribute to your final research proposal. So, think about each thing you are doing as a building block of the final project. In such a short and intensive class, it's of utmost importance that you stay on top of these assignments from week to week and spend time doing the thinking, each piece is cumulative

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 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 educational 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 research proposal.**

Milestone Assignments

Researcher Identity Memo

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 when I was pursuing my doctorate, 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

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) 4) connections to your area of focus 5) 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_fc** .

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

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 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 research fitting into my future work? See Canvas 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.

Using Canvas

Canvas is a learning management platform that allows us to be in dialogue in multiple ways. It's also a way for me to articulate the assignments, materials, and ideas you have to be engaged with from module to module. This course is cumulative and is building from week to week but also within the modules. To that end, please note that the content is sequential, so if you are reading a module, always begin with the module overview, read through it in detail - it will lay out the entire module from overarching ideas, guiding questions, learning goals, and then the actual materials and assignments. Next, go through the content (e.g. pages of content, readings, videos, etc.) in a sequential order. Finally, the assignments are dated in order of how you should do them; so if an assignment is due sooner, do that first, then do the next assignment dated later.

University Policies

Academic Integrity

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the **University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity (https://www.provost.pitt.edu/info/ai1.html)** . Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy. Furthermore, no student may bring any unauthorized materials to an exam, including dictionaries and programmable calculators.

To learn more about Academic Integrity, visit the **Academic Integrity Guide (http://pitt.libguides.com/academicintegrity/)** for an overview of the topic. For hands-on practice, complete the **Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism tutorial (http://pitt.libguides.com/academicintegrity/plagiarism)** .

Attendance and Observance of Religious Holidays

Pitt guidelines on class attendance and observance of religious holidays:

"The observance of religious holidays (activities observed by a religious group of which a student is a member) and cultural practices are an important reflection of diversity. As your instructors, we are committed to providing equivalent educational opportunities to students of all belief systems. At the beginning of the semester, you should review the course requirements to identify foreseeable conflicts with assignments, exams, or other required attendance. If at all possible, please contact us (your course coordinator/s) within the first two weeks of the first class meeting to allow time for us to discuss and

make fair and reasonable adjustments to the schedule and/or tasks." From Faculty Assembly, December 2020

We interpret this language to apply to cultural and spiritual observances, feasts, dances, ceremonies, etc., not covered by colonial notions of religion and/or culture.

Please notify your professor in advance of any anticipated absences related to the guidelines.

Disability Services

Pitt required syllabus statement: If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructors and the Office of Disability Resources and Services, 140 William Pitt Union, at 412-648-7890 or 412-383-7355 (TTY) as early as possible, but no later than the fourth week of the term or visit the **Office of Disability Resources and Services website (https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/disability-access/disability-resources-and-services)** as early as possible, but no later than the 4th week of the term. The DRS will work with you to provide accommodations.

Please let us know if you need resources or accommodations to complete this course. You may also seek campus-wide support, information, and/or services such as **Disability Accommodations (https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/disability-access/disability-resources-and-services/accommodations)** .

NOTE: We recognize that while institutional resources can be useful and important support, interacting with the university can at times be experienced as an invasion of privacy or a source of distress. If you are uncomfortable interacting with the university, please feel free to communicate with us directly about what would be helpful to your learning and participating in the community of the course (Source: Sabina Vaught). Please review the following resources:

- **University of Pittsburgh Non-Discrimination Policy (https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/notice-nondiscrimination-and-anti-harassment-policy-statement)**
- Pitt single-occupancy restroom map and information: **https://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/lgbtqia/single-occupancy-restrooms/ (https://www.lgbtq.pitt.edu/trans-and-non-binary-information/restroom-and-housing-guides)**

Accessibility

Canvas is ADA Compliant and has fully implemented the final accessibility standards for electronic and information technology covered by Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998. Learn more about the **Canvas accessibility statement. (https://community.canvaslms.com/t5/Canvas-Basics-Guide/What-are-the-Canvas-accessibility-standards/ta-p/1564)**

Sexual Harassment

The University of Pittsburgh is committed to maintaining a community free from all forms of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment violates University policy as well as state, federal, and local laws. It is

neither permitted nor condoned. It is also a violation of the University of Pittsburgh's policy against sexual harassment for any employee or student at the University of Pittsburgh to attempt in any way to retaliate against a person who makes a claim of sexual harassment. Any individual who, after thorough investigation and an informal or formal hearing, is found to have violated the University's policy against sexual harassment will be subject to disciplinary action, including, but not limited to, reprimand, suspension, termination, or expulsion. Any disciplinary action taken will depend upon the severity of the offense. For more information, see the **Policies and Guidelines (https://www.provost.pitt.edu/pacwc/policies-and-guidelines)** website.

Copyright Notice

These materials may be protected by copyright. United States copyright law, 17 USC section 101, et seq., in addition to University policy and procedures, prohibits unauthorized duplication or retransmission of course materials. See **Library of Congress Copyright Office (https://www.copyright.gov/)** and the **University Copyright Policy (https://www.library.pitt.edu/copyright)**.

Course Summary:

Date	Details	Due
Fri Oct 24, 2025	**Module 1: Researcher Journal Entry + Discussion Post (Qualitative + Action Research)** (https://canvas.pitt.edu/courses/341197/assignments/1963770)	due by 11:59pm
	Annotate Syllabus + Introduction! (https://canvas.pitt.edu/courses/341197/assignments/1964348)	due by 11:59pm
Sun Oct 26, 2025	**Module 1: Researcher Journal + Post Discussion (Identifying an Area of Focus)** (https://canvas.pitt.edu/courses/341197/assignments/1963772)	due by 11:59pm
Fri Oct 31, 2025	**Module 2: Perusall + Discussion Post - Social Annotation (Indigenous Knowledge and the Story of the Bean)** (https://canvas.pitt.edu/courses/341197/assignments/1963773)	due by 11:59pm

Date	Details	Due
	Module 2: Researcher Journal + Discussion Post: Self Study (https://canvas.pitt.edu/courses/341197/assignments/1963769)	due by 11:59pm
Sun Nov 2, 2025	Story of the Bean Brayboy and Maugham Reading and annotating a journal article focused on epistemologies (https://canvas.pitt.edu/courses/341197/assignments/1965459)	due by 11:22pm
Wed Nov 5, 2025	Module 2: Assignment - Collaborative Sense-making of Theories Padlet Chart (https://canvas.pitt.edu/courses/341197/assignments/1963783)	due by 11:59pm
Sun Nov 9, 2025	Milestone I: Researcher Identity Memo (https://canvas.pitt.edu/courses/341197/assignments/1963779)	due by 11:59pm
Fri Nov 14, 2025	Schedule time with Pitt Writing Center (https://canvas.pitt.edu/courses/341197/assignments/1963788)	due by 11:59pm
Sun Nov 16, 2025	Lesson D: Developing Your Annotated Bibliography (https://canvas.pitt.edu/courses/341197/assignments/1963774)	due by 11:59pm
Wed Nov 19, 2025	Module 4: Discussion - Data Collection in Practice, Participant Observation (https://canvas.pitt.edu/courses/341197/assignments/1963768)	due by 11:59pm
Fri Nov 21, 2025	Module 4: Researcher Journal + Discussion Post: Initial Action Research Design and Research Questions (https://canvas.pitt.edu/courses/341197/assignments/1963771)	due by 11:59pm
Sun Nov 23, 2025	Milestone II: Think Piece + Annotated Bibliography (https://canvas.pitt.edu/courses/341197/assignments/1963781)	due by 11:59pm
Sun Nov 30, 2025	Milestone II: Peer Review of Think Piece + Annotated	due by 11:59pm

Date	Details	Due
	Bibliography (https://canvas.pitt.edu/courses/341197/assignments/1963780)	
	Plan for Micro-Pilot Data Collection (https://canvas.pitt.edu/courses/341197/assignments/1963765)	due by 11:59pm
Wed Dec 3, 2025	Lesson C: Data Collection & Triangulation (https://canvas.pitt.edu/courses/341197/assignments/1963775)	due by 11:59pm
Fri Dec 5, 2025	Lesson E Conducting a Micro-Pilot of Data Collection and Analysis (https://canvas.pitt.edu/courses/341197/assignments/1963766)	due by 11:59pm
Sat Dec 6, 2025	Milestone III: Final Projects (PARTS I & II) - DUE 12/11/25 (don't pay attention to the date in the system). (https://canvas.pitt.edu/courses/341197/assignments/1963782)	due by 11:59pm
Fri Apr 17, 2026	Read and annotated: Indigenous Knowledges and the Story of the Bean (https://canvas.pitt.edu/courses/341197/assignments/1963787)	due by 4:23pm
Wed Apr 29, 2026	Read and annotate: Pine (2008) Chapter 11 on Conducting Action Research (https://canvas.pitt.edu/courses/341197/assignments/1963785)	due by 11:22pm
Sun May 17, 2026	Read and annotated Care-Based Methodologies (https://canvas.pitt.edu/courses/341197/assignments/1963786)	due by 11:22pm
Wed May 20, 2026	Read and annotate: Phillips and Carr (2014) chapter 5 (https://canvas.pitt.edu/courses/341197/assignments/1963784)	due by 11:22pm