

Department of Early Childhood, Elementary
& Middle Level Education

College of Education and Professional Studies

Eastern Illinois University



Handbook
For
Action Research

Research Courses Committee – Spring 2010

Preface

The Department of Early Childhood, Elementary and Middle Level Education seeks to advance scholarly preparation by providing quality teaching and promoting excellence in research/creative activity in order for graduate students to exemplify best teaching practices for children from birth through age fourteen. Graduate students within the department have two options for their culminating experience in the Master's program. As their culminating experience, they can either complete a thesis or an action research project.

A thesis is scholarly research intended to advance knowledge within the academic discipline. Thesis research is conducted under the supervision of a thesis director and in consultation with a thesis committee composed of members of the graduate faculty.

Action research is research that is specific to teachers and it involves a systematic inquiry completed by a teacher to improve one's practice. Action research is conducted within the teacher's educational setting and is intended to inform and improve a teacher's practice.

This handbook is intended for graduate students in the Department of Early Childhood, Elementary and Middle Level Education who choose the action research option. The handbook will serve as a resource with regard to designing, implementing and reporting on action research completed by graduate students in the department.

What is Action Research?

Action research is defined as any systematic inquiry conducted by teachers, administrators, counselors or others with a vested interest in the teaching and learning process or environment for the purpose of gathering information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach and how their students learn (Mills, 2003). Action research is characterized as research that is done by teachers for themselves as a systematic inquiry into one’s own practice (Mertler, 2006).

Thesis vs. Action research

Thesis	Action Research
Main goal – Scholarly contribution to knowledge in the candidate’s selected area of study	Main goal – To improve the practice of a teacher
Thesis credits can be taken as variable credit (ELE 5950)	Action research is part of a course – ELE 5900
Thesis research is conducted by graduate students in consultation with a thesis committee and under the direct supervision of the thesis director who must be a regular member of the Graduate Faculty	Action research is conducted by graduate students under the direct supervision of the ELE 5900 instructor who puts together a committee that provides support and guidance for the action research
Requires approval from Institutional Review Board (IRB)	No IRB approval needed but proposal needs to be approved by ELE 5900 instructor in consultation with a faculty committee
Study could be under any of the three categories of review – exempt, expedited or full review of IRB	Study has to fall under exempt category
Approvals required prior to initiating thesis research: approval of the thesis committee; approval of the proposal by thesis committee; approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB); subject participant consent forms	Approvals required prior to initiating action research: approval of the proposal from ELE 5900 instructor after seeking input from faculty committee; approval of the school building administrator where the action research will be conducted; letter of notification to parents
Uses random sampling techniques	Uses convenience sampling techniques and typically teacher’s own students are subjects
Includes a literature review	Includes a literature review
Thesis must adhere to writing conventions according to the <i>Publication Manual of American Psychological Association</i> (current ed.)	Action Research paper must adhere to writing conventions according to the <i>Publication Manual of American Psychological Association</i> (current ed.)
Completion procedures: Open defense before Thesis Committee; submission to graduate school; submission to library for binding; thesis copy added to the depository in Booth Library.	Completion procedures: Final paper submitted to instructor; paper forwarded to committees for feedback at least a week prior to presentations; presentation of findings before peers and faculty committee.

Ethical Issues

Action research is completed in an educational setting and falls under the purview of social and behavioral research. As with any social and behavioral research, action research must stay within the ethical boundaries set forth for human research. The following important information with regard to ethics, compiled by CITI (the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative) needs to be adhered to with every action research project:

“One of the most important and challenging tasks that investigators face is identifying and evaluating risks associated with participation in research. Unlike biomedical research studies and clinical trials, in which the sources of risk may be more readily identifiable and quantifiable, risks associated with participation in social and behavioral science research are often more ambiguous and less predictable, such as individual reactions to certain events or questions.....

“The identification, assessment, and minimization of risk is paramount to the conduct of ethical social and behavioral research.”

From: <https://www.citiprogram.org/>

Before starting the action research process, all students are required to complete the CITI training available at http://www.eiu.edu/~grants/COMP_IRB_Training.php.

Exempt Research Categories

Unlike thesis research, action research projects will not be approved by the Institutional Review Board. Instead, the instructor will be the certifying authority to ensure that all the graduate students conducting action research are following the ethical guidelines related to research. As action research will not undergo a full review by the Institutional Review Board, it is imperative that it falls under the exempt category. The exempt category guidelines are given in the form that follows. All graduate students must turn in a completed IRB - Form B and certify that the action research falls under the exempt category. A copy of the form is available on the next page. An electronic copy is available at http://www.eiu.edu/~grants/COMP_IRB_Forms.php.

IRB - Form B

Principal Investigator: _____

Title of Project: _____

ONLY research activities in which involvement of human subjects will be in one or more of the categories specified below are eligible for exemption certification. If the research study involves a vulnerable population, such as children (outside the school setting), prisoners, pregnant women, refer to 45 CFR 46 subparts B, C, and D for protections afforded these groups.

Check the appropriate categories that apply to your research project:

_____ 1. Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

_____ 2. Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation. *Note: According to 45 CFR 46.401, if the subjects are children, this exemption applies only to research involving educational tests or observations of public behavior when the investigator(s) do not participate in the activities being observed.*

_____ 3. Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under #2 (above) of this section if: (i) the human subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office; or (ii) federal statute(s) require(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.

_____ 4. Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

_____ 5. Research and demonstration projects which are conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine: (i) public benefit or service programs; (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs; (iii) possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures; or (iv) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs.

_____ 6. Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, (i) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed or (ii) if a food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, or agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Action Research Description

Provide responses to the following items and submit your responses in a Word document. Each response should be numbered or labeled to correspond to the following items. If an item does not apply to your research project, simply indicate “Not applicable.” The research description (answers to all of the items below) should not exceed 5 type-written single-spaced pages. Use a font size of 11 or larger.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

1. **RESEARCH QUESTION/S:** State the purpose and research questions/hypotheses.
2. **DESCRIPTION:** Provide a brief description in layperson’s terms of the proposed action research.

METHODOLOGY

3. **PARTICIPANTS:** Describe the characteristics (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, health status) of the subject population whom you are targeting and the approximate number of participants. Provide exclusion and inclusion criteria. Explain your rationale for exclusion/inclusion criteria.
4. **RECRUITMENT:** If you are not using a convenient sample (from your own classroom), describe how you will identify and recruit prospective subjects.
5. **LOCATION OF STUDY:** Identify specific site/s to be used (your own classroom or an alternate site).
6. **ACTION RESEARCH PROCEDURES:** Describe all procedures that will be carried out for the action research in the form of a timeline for the completion of the action research.
7. **INSTRUMENTS/RESEARCH MATERIALS:** Identify the sources of research material to be obtained from subjects. Indicate whether the material or data will be obtained specifically for action research or whether use will be made of existing specimens, records, or data. If applicable, differentiate between procedures that involve standard or routine procedures from those which will be performed specifically for the conduct of this action research project.

NOTE: Attach a copy of all questionnaires, tests, surveys, or other materials to be administered to the subjects, if applicable.

8. **DATA COLLECTION, STORAGE, & CONFIDENTIALITY:** Describe how data will be collected and recorded. State whether data will be recorded with or without names or identifiers. If subjects are identifiable by name or other means, explain special steps that will be taken to ensure confidentiality. Describe how data will be stored during the study and how it will be secured.
9. **DISSEMINATION:** Describe how the results of the research will be disseminated.
10. **PARENTAL NOTIFICATION:** Describe the notification procedures to be followed. Include applicable notification and/or informed consent forms for review purposes.

RISKS/BENEFITS

11. **RISKS:** Describe the short-term and long-term potential risks (physical, psychological, social, legal, or other) to subjects and assess their likelihood and seriousness. Where appropriate, describe alternative treatments or procedures that might be advantageous to the subjects.
12. **SAFETY PRECAUTIONS:** Describe the procedures for protecting against or minimizing any potential risks, including risks to confidentiality.
13. **BENEFITS:** Describe the potential direct benefits subjects may receive as a result of participating in this research. Describe the potential benefits to society that may be expected from this research.

Action Research Paper

Action research is a cyclical process that includes four stages: the planning stage, the acting stage, the developing stage, and the reflecting stage (Mertler, 2006). As graduate students plan, conduct and reflect on their action research, they are expected to adhere to the American Psychological Association (APA) style conventions for reporting their research. Graduate students must use a current edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* and follow its guidelines, especially with regard to formatting the paper, correct and unbiased use of language, making in-text citations and including an accurate reference list. On the next page is a rubric that will be used for the evaluation of an action research paper. This rubric both outlines the sections that need to be included within the action research paper as well as delineates the expectations for each section of the action research paper.

Rubric for Action Research

* Subject to modifications by ELE 5900 Instructor

	Proficient	Advancing	Emerging
Rationale for topic selection and connection to classroom practice	Selection of topic is thoughtful and clearly connected to a classroom context	Selection of topic is based on classroom context but lacks specificity	Topic has not been fully developed based on classroom context
	The study has clear, practical applications to the resolution of a problem in education.	The study has application to identification of a problem in education	The study's connection to a problem in education is not clearly evident
Writing quality and adherence to APA Style conventions	Abstract – clear and concise, ranges from 150-250 words		Abstract – needs more clarity and/or does not fall within the word limit
	Body of the paper – well organized structure, terms well defined to avoid unnecessary jargon, formatting of the paper follows current APA conventions		Body of the paper needs better organization, some use of unnecessary jargon noticed, formatting of the paper follows current APA conventions
	In-text citations are appropriately cited		In-text citations – no more than 3 discrete kinds of errors
	References – No errors		References list – No more than 3 discrete kinds of errors
Literature Review	Reviews relevant and current research in an integrated manner.	Reviews relevant research but lacks integration	Reviews research but studies not clearly related to the research question
Methods & Results	The methods and research design are clearly connected to the research question.	The methods and research design are connected to the research question.	The methods and research design are not clearly connected to the research question.
	The sources of data are clearly aligned to the research question	The sources of data are aligned to the research question	The sources of data are not clearly aligned to the research question
	The analyses is accurate using all the data sources	The analyses are appropriate with most of the data sources used	The analyses does not make use of all data sources
	Results are clearly stated in an organized manner.	Results are stated and organized.	Results are minimally stated with no clear organization.
Findings & Implications	Findings and implications make an important contribution to the classroom practice.	Findings and implications make a contribution to the classroom practice.	Findings and implications make limited contribution to the classroom practice.
	Limitations are noted or addressed with suggested future studies.	Limitations are noted or addressed with suggested future studies.	Limitations are not noted or addressed and future studies not suggested.
Reflection and Action Plan	Reflection and action plan clearly indicate change in classroom practice based on study and gives rationale for how the change will benefit students	Reflection and action plan consider some modification in classroom practice based on study; limited rationale provided for how the change will benefit students	Reflection and action plan minimally indicate what changes in classroom practice based on the study; no rationale provided for how the change will benefit students

Expectations from Graduate Students

The Department of Early Childhood, Elementary and Middle Level Education sets high expectations for all students. For graduate students who are in the process of completing their Master's degree, a final assessment is completed by a faculty committee. As action research is one of the options for a culminating experience for the graduate students, the faculty committee, put together by the course instructor for each student, will complete a final assessment of the graduate student after the presentation of action research findings. The rubric on the next page is used for this final assessment of the graduate student. As graduate students plan, report on and present their findings related to action research, they are advised to look at the specific sections of the rubric and provide evidence of these during the different stages of the action research process.

Rubric Used for Final Assessment of Master's Candidates

Candidate Demonstrates ...	Does Not Meet Standards	Meets Standards	Exceeds Standards	No Basis for Judgment
GRADUATE SCHOOL ITEMS				
a depth of content knowledge in the discipline				
effective use of technology as appropriate				
the ability to apply content knowledge to practice				
an understanding and respect for professional ethics in the discipline				
a respect for the professional environment through their honesty, integrity, and professionalism				
the ability to effectively evaluate situations and identify an appropriate course of action				
effective oral communication skills				
effective written communication skills				
effective, fair, and honest communication considering not only the message but also the audience				
an understanding of the role of research in the discipline				
the ability to conduct research and apply it to practice				
an understanding of individual differences in clientele				
a respect for all clientele by fostering a supportive and encouraging atmosphere in their workplace				
a respect for individual differences through the use of rich and varied approaches				
the ability to collaborate with other professionals to promote the success of their clientele				
the ability to effectively work with the community to promote the success of their clientele				
DEPARTMENTAL ITEMS:				
an ability to provide evidence of critical thinking and problem solving				
an ability to provide evidence of differentiation of curricula				
an ability to provide evidence of inquiry based instruction				
an ability to engage in reflective practice				

References

Mertler, C. A. (2006). *Action research: Teachers as researchers in the classroom*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Mills, G. E. (2003). *Action research: A guide for the teacher researcher (2nd ed.)*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall.