

Action Research in a Social Justice Online Program

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Master of Arts in Teaching Mission

- Applied study through mixed methods, action research in multicultural, social justice education in K-12 classrooms (e.g., curriculum, leadership).
- Practitioner-oriented knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary to improve education in K-12 schools and close the achievement gap in the state's public schools.

MAT Program Structure

- MAT program at Fresno State is not a credential program
- Cohort model & complete prescribed sequence of courses
- Capstone/Culminating experience includes:
 - comprehensive exam
 - project or thesis
- 30 unites with up to 9 units transferrable from post-credential or MS degree
- Focus on the professional development of educators
- Reflects the professional standards for teacher development created by state, regional, and national professional boards as briefly explicated below
 - National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) for National Board-Certified Teachers
 - 5 California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP)
 - 4 Teacher Performance Expectations (TPE) that explicate the CSTP
 - 10 standards developed by the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support consortium

Program Goals

- **Two major groups of learning outcomes**
 - **Research**
 - **Curriculum & instruction**
- **Goal 1: Curriculum**
 - **Prepare curricular and instructional leaders with knowledge of curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation in multicultural, social justice education through mixed methods, action research.**
 - Learning Outcome 1.1: Graduates will identify important theoretical and research-based characteristics of well-developed curricula and use them to analyze curricula in multicultural, social justice education.
- **Goal 2: Instructional strategies**
 - **Prepare professionals with the ability to analyze and implement effective instructional strategies, including technology, in multicultural, social justice education through mixed methods, action research.**
 - Learning Outcome 2.1: Graduates will use learning and instructional theories and research findings to analyze instructional practices in multicultural, social justice education.

Program Goals (cont.)

- **Goal 3: Assessment & evaluation**

- **Prepare professionals with an understanding of a broad range of assessment and evaluation strategies and the ability to use assessment to inform instruction consistent with multicultural, social justice education and through mixed methods, action research.**

- Learning Outcome 3.3: Graduates will utilize technology to assist in the assessment of teaching and learning in multicultural, social justice education.

- **Goal 4: Leadership**

- **Foster the skills and dispositions necessary to become educational leaders in multicultural, social justice education and mixed methods, action research.**

- Learning Outcome 4.1: Graduates will communicate research-based arguments for educational issues, policies, or research design in multicultural, social justice education.

Research Purpose & Questions

- Purpose

- the aim of this work-in-progress is to understand and explore how online program components (e.g., assignments) build students' knowledge and skills to engage in reflective practice and use action research to pursue classroom-based investigations around social justice issues.

- Research Question

- How does participation in the MAT program influence students' (a) ideas of reflective practice and multicultural education, and (b) ability to engage in action research to address social justice issues in the classroom?

Methods

- Qualitative inquiry
- Participants
 - 26 MAT students (74% female; Fall 2013 cohort)
- Procedures
 - Data collection
 - open-ended responses to Discussion Board prompt end of Spring 2013
 - Focus group conducted at new student orientation onset of Fall 2013

MAT Program Outcomes

- **Critical Questioner:** express a critical, questioning perspective about diverse theoretical paradigms about teaching, learning and school reform, including those generated by marginalized groups, which situate schooling in a larger historical and political context.
- **Scholar Activist:** search, navigate, and critically consume educational research.
- **Mixed Methods Action Researcher/Qualitative and Quantitative:** use, apply, design, and implement research to bring about change and make improvements in their own professional environment.
- **Critically Reflective, Equity-Oriented Practitioner:** demonstrate their knowledge of and ability to use the most appropriate culturally responsive and inclusionary practices that support complex and challenging learning and development of all pupils.
- **Clear Communicator:** communicate clearly and effectively orally, in writing, and online and in their action research studies, projects or theses in a manner that is clear and commands professional attention.
- **Technological Navigator:** use technology critically to access information, to communicate, and as a means of curricular and pedagogical support for higher-level thinking.
- **Social Justice Collaborator:** work with communities of practice on behalf of social justice.

Data

- Online Discussion Board Posts (end of Spring 2013)
 - The purpose of Discussion Board Post 3 is for you to post your reflective thoughts about your experiences within the course. Please consider touching upon: the things that went well in the course; areas that could be strengthened in this online course; identify things that you would like to see modified/changed; the extent to which the assignments promoted your thinking on your topic. Be sure to provide one original post and respond to the posts of your colleagues.
- Focus Group Interviews (beginning of Fall 2013)
 - What are the alignments of course and program outcomes and learning experiences?
 - What are the impacts of course and program learning experiences on MAT students' perceptions of multicultural and social justice issues in your own classrooms?
 - What are the impacts of course and program learning experiences on MAT students' addressing of multicultural and social justice issues in your own classrooms?

Data Analysis

- Constant comparative analysis of Discussion Board posts
 - Identify emergent themes through coding & categorizing of incidents (i.e., statements)
 - Classification of statement into categories conducted by comparing it with previous statements in same and different categories
 - Discussion Board reflections on course structure, learning outcomes, etc.
- Typological coding (Hatch, 2002) of Focus Group Interviews based on program outcomes.

Results

- Discussion Board Posts – 5 major themes
 - Conducting research
 - time
 - organization
 - participation
 - Online tool utility (course delivery)
 - Elluminate (Blackboard Collaborate)
 - Journals/Discussion board reflections
 - Quizzes
 - Learning outcomes
 - Evaluation
 - Research process
 - Written/oral communication
 - Self-learning
 - Juggling life
 - Children/family learning
 - Educational
 - Course/Program Structure
 - Course alignment (ERA 243, CI 245)
 - Assignment structure

Theme 1: Conducting Research

- TG

- “I value what I learned in this course. I have a better idea of what research is about. I think that I prefer qualitative research. I would probably choose a different topic if I were to do it all over again. Let’s hope that doesn’t occur too soon.?”

- ES

- “I really felt both last term and this term gave me an incredible amount of growth and exposure to action research, and how to write academic papers. Reading the examples in the content modules, reviewing our cohort rough drafts, and plodding through it step by step was extremely helpful. I like the action research part, and in fact intend to continue implementing mini-research projects in my classroom in order to improve my instruction, delivery and assessment.”

- MC

- I think the most disappointing thing for me was that I didn’t feel that there was enough time to implement the end results of the data that was gathered. After writing the final project I discovered different ways that I could have collected data and I think it would have been more beneficial for me to further investigate it especially if I were given more time.

Theme 2: Online Tool Utility

- SL
 - “I didn't think about the journals and the discussion board posts as well but I think they were supposed to be that way because one is purely between us and the professor while the other one is something we could share with the whole class. But I do agree that it really seems like we write the same things over and over again. I felt that a lot of what i wrote in my assignments I also shared in my journals and then later in my discussion board posts. It would definitely have been nice if we only had to do one or the other.”
- MC
 - “I agree the journals were helpful for me, because it kept me focused and I was able to record my progress during each stage. I'm a journal writer anyways, and I often write in my journal about personal events that have happened. It's helpful for me to share what is happening or to vent, if needed, but in many ways it helps me to stay organized as to what I had accomplished each week. ”
- JG
 - “The discussion boards and various groups are so beneficial. It helps me realize we're all feeling similar things. Pressure. Stress. Success. Awareness. I've been out of the classroom (as a student) for so long, I'd forgotten that feeling of camaraderie that classmates can share!”

Theme 3: Learning Outcomes

- JG

- “I think the combination of both courses have really opened my eyes to my teaching approaches. Wally's assignments make us see things from multiple perspectives; Jason's assignments make us analyze the approaches a bit more clinically.”

- KM

- “I think the greatest lesson learned this semester is to remain organized. I made a huge commitment when I signed up for the program, and I am proud of my efforts. Walter's class has made a remarkable impact on my teaching-my awareness of Multicultural Education strategies has really transformed my personal philosophy and my teaching methods. Along with that, the research methods courses have given me the motivation to attempt to make a difference and the belief that I can actually accomplish change in my classroom and school campus. “

- LB

- “I do feel like a true graduate student, pursuing a single topic with gusto over the course of many months and then following up with action research. The class gave me great topics for conservation, and I know I will take some valuable tools with me in my career as a teacher. I enjoyed the process of collecting data and drawing applicable conclusions. I feel like I learned more about *how* the process is done even if I have found the write-up challenging. ”

Theme 4: Self-Learning

- SL
 - This was my first year at the elementary level (so I had whole new curriculum to revamp), I had my first baby, and I had almost no help at home with day to day things even after my surgery; so even though I was docked for each of my assignments I was just grateful that they were still accepted considering that I was unable to stay on the schedule given in the syllabus.
- RB
 - “The past few weeks have been very difficult for me to complete every assignment for my MAT and my Credential program, especially since I am working until 5 pm every night. However, I am so close to finishing this program. To accomplish this is allowing me to fulfill a dream that I have held on to since I was a child. Since I am nearly forty, I honestly thought it would never be possible. I assumed I had missed my opportunity when I decided to raise my family, instead of pursuing my own ambitions. In the process of all this stress and sacrifice, I have come to realize my own children have been given a valuable lesson in the importance of an education. As I stay up night after night and toil on the computer, my children realize that though hard work anything is possible and that they should continue their own education right after high school, before they decide to settle down and have a family.”

Theme 5: Course/Program Structure

- Gwen

- “The assignments were big and scary but I really appreciated them. The assignments helped me stay on task and be organized through the writing process. This was incredibly helpful and a vital stress reliever when writing my final paper. Staying organized was a key skill to help me through the entire process.”
- “I loved how the research writing and data process was organized. The before and after writing process was great and really helped me write my final paper. It kept me organized, it kept me constantly working...”

- DW

- “What I appreciated about this course was how the assignments were broken up into chunks so that the overall action research project did not feel overwhelming. The pacing between the assignment due dates was equally helpful in making this course manageable with our busy work schedules and family life as well. I also enjoyed participating in the group Discussion Board posts because it made me feel that my stresses and worries were not mine alone. It helped hearing what others in our class had to say and to receive many useful suggestions.”

Theme 5: Course/Program Structure-- continued

- RB

- “I agree that having the research project broken into chunks was very helpful. I think being able to build upon the assignments and receive feedback was instrumental in actually understanding what was expected for each unit. By the time I began working on each "B", I had some understanding of "A" and I was able to clean things up and work out any misinformation. I was really grateful for the A to B structure.”

- ES

- “That being said, I have to really appreciate the online, 24/7 nature of the course structure. If I had to be in a face-to-face environment, I would never have been able to make it through.”

Program Learning Outcomes in Focus Group Data

- Critical Questioner:
 - “When we are reading and critiquing the case studies, it helped me to take a position on something and try to stick with that. Sometimes it’s hard because you can see it in two different ways.”
- Clear Communicator:
 - “[The first course] was much more of a critical analysis writing focus, getting into academic vocabulary writing and centering in on the issues of multicultural social justice education.”

Technological Navigator

- “The new cohorts, they need to understand, they need “
- “[Need to know] shortcuts on how to cite your sources, APA style. . . I felt like I could have used more support in that area.”
- “For CI241, continued attention to the expanding role of technology in education, I think the technology not so much”

Scholar Activist

- “I will say some of the units and some of the assignments for CI241, if I didn’t have an advisory class and it was only my biology class, I think it would have been really hard if not impossible. I only have the kids for half of the year, and we have a ton of content standards we have to address. I wouldn’t have been able to weave in some of those perspectives and some of the assignments.”
- “With my research course, I did focus on trying to come up with best teaching strategies for helping English learners become more successful with language arts, and I didn’t feel that necessarily had a social justice multicultural emphasis on it, but in my opinion, it is kind of social justice to try to improve the quality of education for an underserved population.”

Scholar Activist

- “I did a gender equity unit for the spring, did a variety of lessons, using a text that had a pathway for social justice education that would lead to activism. You talk about historical figures, then later I did another lesson about a girl who wanted to play football, then the students wrote about what they felt, did a journal, pretended they were the girl and how they would feel if they were treated that way. They took the historical perspective and then internalized it. This led to another lesson about how women are portrayed in books.”
- “My AP Environmental Science kids were jazzed about trying to pass legislation to ban plastic bags. It was a little out of the context of stuff we had been working on specifically in that class (CI240), but it was really focusing on what my students were really wanting to run with.”

Critically Reflective, Equity-Oriented Practitioner

- “Starting with the Educational Life History assignment, and then getting some information on how different theories or different ways that people describe their own outlook, kind of allows you to shape yours and think about yours more critically.”
- “Some of the lessons that were presented in Sleeter & Grant’s *Turning on Learning*, even if they were for elementary school, I was able to use them or tweak them or do more in depth with the analysis or with the discussion questions at the end to be at high school level.”

Mixed Methods Researcher

- “I came from hard science, so to kind of switch gears, it was really good , this is more qualitative-type stuff and it’s okay to talk about feelings . . . It was a good introduction to the expectations of the program.”
- “If I didn’t know how to use Excel already, I would have felt overwhelmed.”
- “I’ve started doing a lot more data tracking.”

Social Justice Collaborator

- “I took a gender equity focus on most of my work which was helpful in the end because I was able to bring that into my final project. Having that focus helped me choose; there were so many things to choose from. Also, it was helpful to my students, because they were like “Oh, we’re going to talk about that again.”
- “With my research on scripted reading programs, a disproportionate amount of low socioeconomic, Hispanic and minority students were receiving scripted reading programs. Is that socially just, that they were not getting rich literature? Sometimes, you don’t discover the social justice aspect until later.”

Impact

- “My credential program had a social justice focus to it, and I remember my first two years being really gung ho. Now we get inundated with [standardized testing] we can’t really do those big units and get to the next step of social justice. For me, this was about coming back to this, and to have this not only as a refresher but to grow and have this back as a focal point and take it to the next level of social justice. . . making the multicultural piece top priority. Multicultural education is now an explicit part of my lesson planning.”

Discussion

- Attaining program and student learning outcomes challenging & requires constant reflection & evaluation of courses and key components (e.g., assignments, assessments)
- Need for more explicit attention to certain program outcomes (Technological Navigator, Scholar Activist)
- Be selective in utilization of online tools (i.e., focus on quality using selected tools)
- *Awareness* of multicultural social justice education (easy) vs. multicultural social justice *activism* (difficult)
- Engaging students in action research requires considerably structured courses to ensure cohesive experience

Future Directions

- Courses
 - Assignments--Keep aligned/ scaffolded
 - Online tool utility
 - Select a few & stick with (do not feel like “need” to use all types)
 - Community building
 - Activities
 - Data collection & analysis
 - Engagement (service-learning)
- Program
 - Course alignment
 - Evaluation & refinement of program SOAPs
 - Faculty collaboration

Thanks for your interest

- Please contact us for more information
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