• Action Research Project, Action Research Thesis Guidelines •

Master of Arts in Teaching

California State University, Fresno
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These guidelines provide an overview of the final culminating experience (action research project, action research thesis) of the Master of Arts in Teaching, Kremen School of Education and Human Development (MAT-KSOEHD). MAT-KSOEHD graduate students are urged to visit regularly the Division of Graduate Studies Web site for news, information, forms, deadlines, financial aid information, etc.:
http://csufresno.edu/gradstudies/

Vision of a Project or Thesis

The culminating experience for the MAT-KSOEHD degree should be a scholarly work that contributes to a master's degree candidate's knowledge and demonstrates an understanding of curriculum, instruction, and assessment that reflects multicultural, social justice education and is informed by ongoing action research. Each project (CI 298B, 4 units) or thesis (CI 299B, 4 units) include an action research study, requiring at least one cycle of problem identification and rationale, data collection, analysis and action plan.

Definition of a Project

A project:

- involves a significant undertaking in multicultural, social justice education,
- demonstrates originality and independent thinking,
- reflects creative action research related to the candidate's professional goals, and
- is summarized in a written document that includes the project's significance, guiding question(s), methodology, findings or conclusion, and proposed action plan.

~ Adapted from the Division of Graduate Studies Handbook, p. K-3, rev. 5/09

A student has one project advisor. In addition to guiding the course of the project, the advisor is responsible for submitting the following to Maria Elrod (Graduate Technician) in ED 100; (a) approved project proposal form prior to the semester (fall, 2013) in which the student plans to register and enroll in CI 298B and (b) the grade for CI 298B on the Master's Degree Clearance form plus two copies of the project abstract by the last week of the semester prior to graduation (spring, 2014). For more information, see pp. K-3 through K-5 in http://csufresno.edu/gradstudies/handbook/secK.pdf

Definition of a Thesis

A thesis:
- involves a more thorough, systematic study of a significant and "unique problem" in multicultural, social justice education,
- demonstrates original, critical, and independent thinking,
- investigates specific, well-defined questions or issues, frequently forming questions to be tested in a more extensive mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) design,
- relates to an existing body of theoretical or empirical knowledge in the field (includes an extensive literature review),
- is summarized in a written document that clearly identifies the problem, states the major assumptions, explains the significance of the undertaking, sets forth the sources for and methods of gathering information, analyzes the data, and offers a conclusion or recommendation, all consistent with action research methodology and multicultural, social justice education, and
- includes a thesis proposal and an oral defense of the thesis before the candidate's committee as the initial and final steps in the process.

~ Adapted from the Division of Graduate Studies Handbook, p. K-5, rev. 8/07

A thesis committee has three members. The Committee Chair has primary advising responsibility and verifies that all forms are completed and deadlines adhered to. The completed thesis is due approximately 7 weeks before the last day of spring semester, 2014. The oral defense of the thesis then follows. For detailed information, visit http://csufresno.edu/gradstudies/thesis/ and see pp. K-5 through K-8 in http://csufresno.edu/gradstudies/handbook/secK.pdf

Basic Structure of a Project or Thesis

A typical MAT-C&I project has four chapters and a thesis has five chapters. Depending on the project or thesis, the number of chapters may vary from three to six. Each master's degree candidate should confer with his or her advisor to determine the appropriate format for the design of the project or thesis. Multimedia projects or theses may require a slightly different format.

The Division of Graduate Studies Web site contains thesis templates that provide useful guidance for word-processing the prefatory pages of a thesis or project (i.e., abstract, title page, acknowledgments, Table of Contents, List of Tables, and List of Figures), as well as formatting the chapters, references, and appendices. See http://csufresno.edu/gradstudies/thesis/templates.shtml Note: Projects do not include the thesis approval pages or reproduction authorization page. Few include a copyright page. However, projects submitted for consideration to be included in the Henry Madden

Library may wish to include such a page. For information on library-bound projects, see
http://www.csufresno.edu/gradstudies/forms/frm/Library-BoundProjectsPolicy.pdf)

The contents of each of the chapters in a typical 4-chapter project or 5-chapter thesis are summarized below:

Project Report Format:

The recommended format for an MAT project is four chapters. An overview of each of the chapters is included below:

Chapter 1 – Statement of Problem/Introduction

This chapter describes the problem and a rationale for the project. It contains a central research question and supporting questions. This chapter answers the question: Why is this project significant and valuable for me and for others, particularly those interested in multicultural, social justice education? (One important criterion distinguishing the project from a thesis is the problem investigated in a project does not need to be unique or totally original, as is the case in a thesis.)

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

In this chapter, the project is situated in the literature. The literature reviewed should provide a background for the study. Related research, theory, and practical applications provide the rationale for the way the research was designed. The literature selected should be significant and clearly related to the topic. Primary sources are preferred, although a blend of primary and secondary sources is typical. The literature review provides the framework for the design of the research (Chapter 3) and the conclusions/reflections/action plan (Chapter 4). It answers the question: How does this project relate to and build on studies that have already been done in multicultural, social justice education?

Chapter 3 – Action Research Methodology and Results

This chapter describes the details of the project, describing the action research design and details of data collection and analysis. Formal and/or informal assessment instruments should be administered and the results evaluated. This chapter answers the questions: What did I do to design and implement this action research? What did I find out?

Chapter 4 – Conclusions/Action Plan

This chapter presents an answer to the research question(s) and is the place to put thoughts, opinions, and conclusions. This chapter evaluates the findings and analyzes what the findings mean in relation to previous studies, as well as discusses the relevance and impact of the findings on your professional growth, classroom instruction and

perhaps social justice outside your classroom. An important component of this chapter is an action plan, describing actions that will be taken as a result of the findings in the next cycle of the action research spiral. It answers the question: How is what I found out important to me and to the larger educational community?

References

All of the articles, books, Web sites, etc., cited in the project report are included in the reference section. The references should be formatted using APA style.
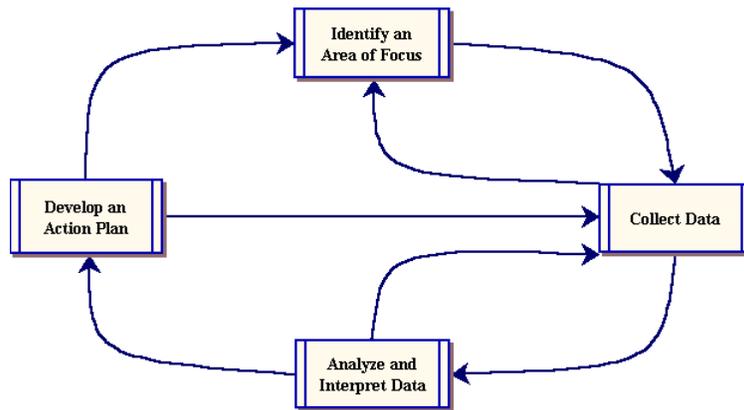
Dialectic Action Research Spiral

[Diagram from p. 20 of Mills, G.E. (2007). *Action research: A guide for the teacher researcher* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.]

Appendix

The appendix will include a variety of materials. For a project that includes a product, the product may be put here or it may be included in a separate format. Data collection tools, raw data, student work, transcripts of interviews, lists of additional resources, or other relevant materials may be included to contribute to the reader's understanding of the project.

Thesis Format:

The recommended format for an MAT thesis is five chapters. An overview of each of the chapters is included below:

Chapter 1 – Introduction
This chapter describes the problem and provides a rationale for the thesis. It answers the question: Why is this thesis significant and valuable for me and for others? Chapter 1

provides a context for the unique problem or issues examined, describes the setting, states the purpose, describes the need for the thesis (why it is necessary and who will benefit from it), and concludes with a summary of the major points covered in the chapter followed by an overview of the organization of remaining chapters. Like all chapters in the thesis, this chapter is written formally in third person. Contractions, informal language, and statements of opinions (editorializing) should be avoided. (This chapter is usually 5-8 pages in length.)

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

In this chapter, the thesis is thoroughly situated in the literature. The literature reviewed should provide a background for the project thesis. Related research, theory, and practical applications provide the rationale for the way the thesis was designed. The literature selected should be significant and clearly related to the topic. Primary sources are strongly preferred, although a limited number of secondary sources may be cited. Current research from scholarly journals is also preferred. APA style should be followed closely in citing references. Direct quotations should be used sparingly. The literature review provides the framework for the design of the thesis (Chapter 3), the results and findings (Chapter 4), and the implications of the study and resultant action plan (Chapter 5). It answers the question: How does this thesis relate to studies that have already been done and make a unique contribution? (The typical length of this chapter is 20-25 pages. Chapters should begin with a short summary of the previous chapter(s) and conclude with a short preview of the next chapter.)

Chapter 3 –Methodology

This chapter provides details of the action research design, including the research questions, null hypotheses if relevant, description of the participants (demographic data), instrumentation (assessments, etc.), procedure (how the action research design was executed, how data were collected, etc.), and data analysis techniques (a description of the mixed methods, quantitative/qualitative analyses that were conducted). Note: No results are included in this chapter, although it may include a table with participant demographic information. This chapter answers the question: What did I do to design and carry out this action research? (Chapter 3 is usually 8-15 pages in length.)

Chapter 4 – Results/Findings

In this chapter, the results of the study are described. Data is presented, both in graphical (tables and figures) and narrative form. Statistical findings are presented in detail, often organized by research question (in the case of an empirical study). This chapter only presents the results; it does not include a discussion or an interpretation of the results. This chapter answers the question: What did I find out in my unique action research study?

Chapter 5 – Conclusions and Action Plan

This chapter includes a summary of the action research study, as well as the findings. This chapter discusses and analyzes what the results mean in relation to previous studies and in terms of an action plan for a next cycle. Limitations are identified, implications are discussed, and recommendations for further research through an action plan are presented. It answers the question: How is what I found out (or developed) important to me and to the larger educational community? What is my next step or action plan?

References

List all books, journal articles, Web sites, and other sources cited in the project. Do not include materials consulted but not cited, nor documentation of personal communication.

Appendix

The Appendix can include a variety of materials. Data collection tools (e.g., surveys or observation instruments), letters of permission, raw data, student work, transcripts of interviews, lists of additional resources, Web page screen shots, or other relevant materials may be included to contribute to the reader's understanding of the thesis.