Week 3 Assignment: Background – Developing Your Action Research Plan

Overview
The first two weeks provided a variety of readings, lectures, interviews and activities that helped students recognize the importance of action research in addressing many needed topics or areas of need in schools. You even had an opportunity to hear from three school leaders discussing their interests in action research. As we have explained in our lectures and our written comments, we did not design this course as a precursor to a dissertation. Instead, we wanted to provide each of you with the tools to conduct action research in whatever leadership position you may pursue.

This week will focus on developing a detailed action research plan. You will see from our examples, as well as from the readings and resources, there are a variety of strategies and steps to follow in conducting action research. Two of the major goals this week will be providing a framework, or a how to approach action research perspective, as well as sharing strategies that will empower you to conduct an action research project. Remember the action research plan is a part of your intern plan – it is an overview, a guide for conducting your action research. The action research project is the process and product – it is the implementation and assessment of your plan and it may take several months to complete. This course focuses on the development of an effective plan that will guide your action research project.

Learning Outcomes:
1) Know which areas for action research to address school improvement are priorities of the site supervisor.
2) Develop a clear and concise research question and/or statement to address the school improvement project(s).
3) Identify and analyze the common steps or format to design an action research plan (e.g., methods for data collection/analysis, research tools needed, etc.).
4) Understand the importance of disseminating the results of the action research project in the final intern report and to other scholar practitioners and interested stakeholders.

Performance Outcomes:
1) Write a research question and/or clear statement to address the possible areas for action research emerging from the interview and brainstorming.
2) Draft an action research plan that includes:
   - Goals and objectives of the research investigation
   - Resources and research tools needed for data gathering
   - Persons responsible for implementation of the action research plan
   - Process for monitoring the achievement of goals and objectives
   - Assessment instrument(s) to evaluate the effectiveness of the action research study
3) Review the steps in your research plan and make any needed revisions.
4) Include in the action research plan, the methods used to disseminate findings of the research project.
Rubric

Use the following Rubric to guide your work on the Week 3 Assignment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Accomplished</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The evidence suggests that this work is a “Habit of Mind.” The educator is ready to mentor others in this area.</td>
<td>The evidence suggests that performance on this work matches that of a strong educator.</td>
<td>The evidence does not yet make the case for the educator being proficient at this task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Research – Developing your question(s) or problem(s) statement</td>
<td>Student provides a clear description of the action research question(s) or problem(s) statement that reference rationale and previous research into this question(s) or problem(s). (3 Points)</td>
<td>Student briefly describes a research question or problem statement, but does not discuss the rationale or research leading to the development of the question or statement. (2 Points)</td>
<td>Student fails to identify a research question or statement and does not discuss any of the rationale or previous research in trying to develop a research question or problem statement. (1 Point)</td>
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</table>
| Draft Action Research Plan and Blueprint   | Student clearly identifies all areas of his or her action research plan and includes:  
  ● Goals and objectives/outcomes of the research investigation  
  ● Activities designed to achieve the objectives  
  ● Resources and research tools needed for data gathering  
  ● Draft timeline for completion or implementation of activities  
  ● Persons responsible for implementation of the action research plan  
  ● Process for monitoring the achievement of goals and objectives | Student identifies less than the seven areas addressed in the draft action research plan and does not provide complete descriptions for each area. (5 – 7 Points) | Student identifies fewer than five areas of the draft action research plan and does not provide complete descriptions for each of the areas. (1 – 4 Points) |
| **EDLD 5301 Research**  
| **Martha Sells – ET8013** |

| **Assessment instrument(s) to evaluate the effectiveness of the action research study**  
| (8 – 10 Points) |

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<tr>
<th><strong>Reviewing, revising and posting the draft action research plan using the recommended template(s)</strong></th>
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</table>
| Student reviews the draft action research plan and posts a completed draft Action Research Plan that addresses all elements identified in Tool 7.1 Action Planning Template or completes all elements of the SIP/PIP (School or Professional Improvement Plan of Action).  
| (3 Points) |
| Student posts the draft action research plan using one of the templates (i.e., Tool 7.1 or the SIP or PIP Plan of Action), but does not complete all elements of the template.  
| (2 Points) |
| Student posts a draft action research plan but the plan addresses less than half of the elements of the recommended template.  
| (1 Point) |

<table>
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<th><strong>Describing your dissemination plan</strong></th>
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| Students provide a thorough description of a plan to disseminate and share their action research plan, and their dissemination plan addresses:  
|  
| ● Background information on action research project  
|  
| ● Design of the action research project (must include procedures, data collection and data analysis)  
|  
| ● Describes what is being learned from the action research project  
|  
| ● Includes concluding thoughts and recommendations  
| (4 Points) |
| Students provide a dissemination plan but addresses only three elements of the plan.  
| (3 Points) |
| Students provide a partial dissemination plan.  
| (1 Point) |

<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Assignment Mechanics</strong></th>
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</table>
| Responses are relevant to course content; no errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Students demonstrate proper APA  
|  
| Responses are relevant to course content; few errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation.  
|  
| Responses do not reflect knowledge of course content, lack clarity and depth, and/or include multiple errors in grammar, punctuation, and/or spelling.  
|
Week Three Assignment, Part 1 – Writing an Action Research Question(s) or Problem Statement

You have had many opportunities (e.g., review and conference regarding your intern plan; the interviews with the school leaders; the Dana text identification of nine common topics for school action research, Step 1 in the Harris et al. text) to review and analyze topics or questions for action research. The Dana text provides a sampling of research questions corresponding to the nine common topics for action research; see Sample Inquiry Questions, pp. 65 – 66. We have also provided another sample of action research questions from an action research project; see the Resource Section for the Equity Audit of Mathematics by Jo Ann Colson and Valerie Petzelka, two elementary principals in Tomball ISD, who are doctoral students in the Lamar Educational Leadership program. Please read their research questions that guided their equity audit.

Using the various examples of action research questions or statements, write a research question and/or clear statement to address the possible areas for action research emerging from the interview(s), readings and brainstorming. This action research question(s) or statement describing the action research project should clearly identify the agreed upon topic that you will research throughout this program, or until, the project is completed. The question or statement should briefly describe the rationale or previous research you have conducted leading to this question or problem statement.
Retention is an ongoing problem in college preparatory classes. The drop rate is at an unacceptable level at this time. The college has decided to pilot a new product within its Blackboard environment that is marketed as a tool to assist in alerting, tracking, and communicating with students exhibiting signs they may be close to dropping these courses. In what way will implementing the Starfish Retention Solutions product within San Jacinto College’s Blackboard system help increase student retention in college preparatory classes?
Week Three Assignment, Part 2 – Developing an Action Research Plan

Draft an action research plan that includes:

- Goals and objectives/outcomes of the research investigation
- Activities designed to achieve the objectives
- Resources and research tools needed for data gathering
- Draft timeline for completion or implementation of activities
- Persons responsible for implementation of the action research plan
- Process for monitoring the achievement of goals and objectives
- Assessment instrument(s) to evaluate the effectiveness of the action research study

Please check the Resource section of the course for a template, SIP or PIP (School or Professional Improvement Project) Plan of Action that you may wish to use in developing and submitting your Action Research Plan of Action Brief or Outline. You may also use the template found in the Harris et al. text, Tool 7.1 Action Planning Template, p. 85, this is also available as a free download, see p. vii.
GOAL: Retention is an ongoing problem in college preparatory classes. The drop rate is at an unacceptable level at this time. The college has decided to pilot a new product within its Blackboard environment that is marketed as a tool to assist in alerting, tracking, and communicating with students exhibiting signs they may be close to dropping courses. In what way will implementing the Starfish Retention Solutions product within San Jacinto College’s Blackboard system help increase student retention in college preparatory classes?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Action Steps</th>
<th>Person(s) Responsible</th>
<th>Timeline: Start/End</th>
<th>Needed Resources</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Determine cohort participants</td>
<td>Randomly select one college preparatory math course section from each of the three campuses to include in the study.</td>
<td>Martha Sells Brenda Blue</td>
<td>8/23/20 - 9/9/10</td>
<td>Access to course rosters</td>
<td>This step will ensure we have three full classes of 30 students each to include in the study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement Starfish Retention</td>
<td>Assure Starfish is accessing the selected courses within the Blackboard system to include the selected course sections.</td>
<td>Martha Sells Starfish Personnel</td>
<td>9/9/10 - 12/16/10</td>
<td>Access to Blackboard system and Starfish system</td>
<td>This step will assure we have all technology in place to properly alert instructors of designated issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solutions product</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gather baseline data</td>
<td>Research data from latest previous semester of college preparatory math students that did not have Starfish implemented. Data should include the following questions: -How many students from the non-Starfish group dropped the course within the first 4 weeks, second 4 weeks, just prior to final drop dates? -How many students were contacted during the time of the non-Starfish cohort's semester? -How many students from the non-Starfish group successfully completed the course?</td>
<td>Martha Sells George Gonzales</td>
<td>8/23/10 – 10/29/10</td>
<td>Access to past course records Access to past student records</td>
<td>This step will provide quantitative data for which to compare drop rates of students included in the Starfish activated courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Responsible Person(s)</td>
<td>Dates</td>
<td>Access Requirements</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conduct Interviews</td>
<td>Interview a random selection of students who attended the non-Starfish classes to inquire if contact from a retention specialist or counselor influenced their decision to remain in the course.</td>
<td>Martha Sells</td>
<td>8/23/10 – 10/29/10</td>
<td>Access to past course records&lt;br&gt;Access to past student records</td>
<td>This step will provide qualitative data for which to compare drop rates of students included in the Starfish activated courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gather comparison data</td>
<td>Research data from Starfish implemented course sections identified for cohort group. &lt;br&gt;Data should include the following questions:&lt;br&gt;- How many students from the Starfish group dropped the course within the first 4 weeks, second 4 weeks, just prior to final drop dates?&lt;br&gt;- How many students were contacted during the time Starfish implemented cohort's semester due to raised flags indicating concerns?&lt;br&gt;- How many students from the Starfish group successfully completed the course?</td>
<td>Martha Sells&lt;br&gt;George Gonzales</td>
<td>12/16/10 – 1/28/10</td>
<td>Access to cohort course records&lt;br&gt;Access to cohort student records</td>
<td>This step will provide quantitative data for which to compare drop rates of students included in the non-Starfish activated courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct Interviews</td>
<td>Interview a random selection of students who attended the Starfish classes to inquire if contact from a retention specialist or counselor influenced their decision to remain in the course.</td>
<td>Martha Sells</td>
<td>12/16/10 – 1/28/10</td>
<td>Access to cohort course records&lt;br&gt;Access to cohort student records</td>
<td>This step will provide qualitative data for which to compare drop rates of students included in the non-Starfish activated courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze/compare data</td>
<td>Prepare a report that will explain comparisons of the two groups of students. Report should include quantitative and qualitative data gathered throughout the semester. Data should be provided in the form of text, spreadsheet, and charts.</td>
<td>Martha Sells&lt;br&gt;George Gonzales&lt;br&gt;Niki Whiteside&lt;br&gt;EdTech Leadership Team</td>
<td>2/1/11 – 2/25/10</td>
<td>Access to all data collected&lt;br&gt;Microsoft Word&lt;br&gt;Microsoft Excel</td>
<td>This step will provide analytical data to justify the decision to retain or abandon the Starfish Retention Solutions product.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present findings</td>
<td>A presentation using data from report will be prepared and presented to the Learning Management Systems User Group and Technology Users Group.</td>
<td>Martha Sells&lt;br&gt;Niki Whiteside</td>
<td>3/2011</td>
<td>Meeting of Technology Users Group</td>
<td>This step will provide a comprehensive presentation for the TUC to make an informed decision.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Week Three Assignment, Part 3 – Steps to Follow in Your Action Research Plan

As discussed previously, there are many how to conduct action research steps or strategies to follow in developing your Action Research Plan. Some of the readings have already described the action research process, and some have even provided illustrations demonstrating the action research cycle.

One of the better and concise texts describing steps in action research* is your supplemental text, *Examining what we do to improve our schools: 8 steps from analysis to action* by Sandra Harris, Stacey Edmonson, and Julie Combs, (Eye on Education, 2010). We added this to the course because we think it provides an excellent how to implement action research blueprint that you may use for any school or professional improvement project. Here are the steps they outline:

1. Examining the work: Setting the Foundation – in other words, identifying needs or topics for action research and this may emerge from the Site Based Decision Making Committee, or from needs like those identified in your intern plan.
2. Analyzing data – you have had many opportunities to do this, and you examined at least 9 data gathering strategies from your text in Part 2 of this week’s assignments.
3. Developing deeper understanding – these are additional data collection techniques, as well as, examining qualitative data through active listening, focus groups, etc.
4. Engaging in Self-Reflection – this summarizes much of what you have been doing in this course, and throughout the program, beginning with your many self-assessments of leadership in EDLD 5311.
5. Exploring Programmatic Patterns – This includes asking the appropriate questions, identifying data patterns and gaps, and learning to address equity issues.
6. Determining direction – Working collaboratively to address action research questions, monitoring progress, and assessing achievement.
7. Taking action for school improvement – Using appropriate steps or templates like the SIP or PIP Plan of action to guide the action research.
8. Sustaining improvement – Learning to use the tools of action research as an ongoing process for professional development and school improvement.

*Please see the Action Research Project Process Overview Example: Student Use of Cell Phones in the Resource Section for a more detailed outline.

Using this outline, or the PIP/SIP template, review the steps, make any needed revisions and submit your draft Action Research Plan. Be sure to also upload your Plan on your Action Research Blog for others to view and share insights.
Complete Part 3 of this assignment below. The box will expand as you type.

**ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT**

**PROCESS OVERVIEW**

**A RETENTION STRATEGY PLAN INVOLVING**

**THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STARFISH RETENTION SOLUTIONS**

1. **SETTING THE FOUNDATION:**
   Retention is an ongoing problem in college preparatory classes. The drop rate is at an unacceptable level at this time. The college has decided to pilot a new product within its Blackboard environment that is marketed as a tool to assist in alerting, tracking, and communicating with students exhibiting signs they may be close to dropping courses. In what way will implementing the Starfish Retention Solutions product within San Jacinto College’s Blackboard system help increase student retention in college preparatory classes?

2. **ANALYZING DATA:**
   For baseline purposes, gather data from the most recent previous semester of college preparatory math students that did not have Starfish implemented. This quantitative data should be systematic rather than random. (Harris, Edmonson, Combs, 2010) Data should include the following questions:

   - How many students from the non-Starfish group dropped the course within the first 4 weeks, second 4 weeks, just prior to final drop dates?
   - How many students were contacted during the time of the non-Starfish cohort's semester?
   - How many students from the non-Starfish group successfully completed the course?

   Interview a random selection of students who attended the non-Starfish classes to inquire if contact from a retention specialist or counselor was made in an attempt to assist them with any issues that may have been deciding factors to their dropping or continuing the courses involved. influenced their decision to remain in the course.

   Retention specialists and instructors of the students involved should be interviewed to determine the students that were contacted, what issues were involved, and results of those conversations. It will be important to gather as much information from them as soon as possible, while details will be fresh. It will also be important to determine if and what type of recordkeeping process was used to track these students, and how much time was involved in doing so.

   For comparison, research data from Starfish implemented course sections identified for cohort group. Data should include the following questions:

   - How many students from the Starfish group dropped the course within the first 4 weeks, second 4 weeks, just prior to final drop dates?
   - How many students were contacted during the time Starfish implemented cohort's semester due to raised flags indicating concerns?
   - How many students from the Starfish group successfully completed the course?
It will be important to note how much time this process required to identify, contact, track and record interaction of retention specialists and instructors with their students.

Interview a random selection of students who attended the Starfish classes to inquire if contact from a retention specialist or counselor influenced their decision to remain in the course.

3. DEVELOPING DEEPER:

Prepare a report that will explain comparisons of the two groups of students. Report should include quantitative and qualitative data gathered throughout the semester. Data should be provided in the form of text, spreadsheet, and charts.

In this report, the data gathered from actual records will serve as quantitative data, and interview information will serve as qualitative.

4. ENGAGE IN SELF-REFLECTION:

- Who will need to be involved in the gathering of said data?
- Who will need to be involved in the analysis phase of said data?
- Who will need to be involved in preparing reports to be presented to administration?

5. EXPLORING PROGRAMMATIC PATTERNS:

Once data is gathered and organized, is a pattern identified? Do we have enough data to determine the effectiveness of the product? Have we been objective in our reporting? Is the report clear, concise, and accurate? Have we looked at all possibilities to ensure we have a substantial and dependable amount of data? Have we intentionally looked for the existence of bias? (Harris, Edmonson, Combs, 2010)

6. DETERMINING DIRECTION:

Once again, the EdTech Leadership team will gather to assure all data samples have been identified, processes are in place, resources are prepared, and reports are asking the appropriate questions. The project will be an agenda item of each bi-weekly meeting until complete.

7. TAKING ACTION FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Steps in the SIS template and this plan will be carried out beginning in September 2010. It will be revisited bi-weekly by the ELT, and consistently monitored by the project manager. It is vital this project be carried out in order to assure budget needs for the product are necessary, or if the monies can be released for other more useful products.

8. SUSTAIN IMPROVEMENT

This project will not be a short, easy answer. It will require ongoing monitoring, consistent gathering of data, and constant updates. It will take at least two semesters to complete. Even then, it may be discovered more data is needed to assure an accurate and viable outcome. With a successful implementation of Starfish, it is the hope of the Ed Tech division that the result will be we are indeed retaining students for a successful education at San Jacinto College. As stated in Examining What We Do to Improve Our Schools: 8 Steps from Analysis to Action, “the process is cyclical and continuous”. (Harris, Edmonson, Combs, p.3)
Week Three Assignment, Part 4 – Sharing Your Action Research Plan, Progress, Findings, and Recommendations

Read chapter 5 from the Dana text, *The Travelogue: Sharing your work with others*, pp. 135 – 169, and write a description of how you will share the progress and process of your action research project, as well as discussing ways to disseminate your action research project findings and recommendations. Be sure to include information on the four critical tasks you must include in effectively sharing your action research project, see the Dana text, pp. 163 – 169.
Complete Part 4 of this assignment below. The box will expand as you type.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data, findings and recommendations resulting from this research study will be shared and disseminated in phases. As you can see from the tables above, the first phase of the project is to determine the baseline data with which to compare and contrast the newest data.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once baseline data has been collected, it will be examined and analyzed by several people including myself, the Director of Research, and my supervisor. The first step will be for me to gather the data into a readable, understandable form that can visually represent our findings. I will then share this data with the other two individuals, and we will collaboratively decide how to tweak the reports, spreadsheets and charts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This report will also include the background and basis of the project, justification for conducting the study (including costs of the product), ROI information that was provided by the vendor, and steps outlined in conducting the research.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Once that has been decided, we will continue to monitor students in the Starfish cohort, while assisting instructors, retention specialists and counselors with any issues they may have when using the product.</td>
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<tr>
<td>At the end of the semester, data gathering will begin for the Starfish cohort. Since the format will have been decided with the baseline group, I will then incorporate the Starfish cohort data into the existing document. This will result in the text and graphical based report as described in the above plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The three individuals mentioned earlier will then meet with the EdTech Leadership Team to make any necessary adjustments, and to prepare a presentation for the Learning Management System User Group (LUG) and Technology Users Council (TUC) of the San Jacinto College District. The members of this group are a representation of many divisions of the college including faculty, staff, and administrators. They are responsible to assure the college is spending time, effort, and money in the most efficient manner for technology based teaching tools.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The report and presentation will contain recommendations decided upon that will be driven by the quantitative and qualitative date within.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This presentation will take place during the LUG’s and TUC’s monthly meetings in February of 2011. At that time all representatives on this committee will discuss the future of Starfish Retention Solutions depending upon the findings from this study. Once a decision is made, we will either roll the product out college-wide, or cease our contract at the end of its term. If cessation is the decision, announcements will be communicated to those currently using the product to enable all involved to prepare for its unavailability in the coming semester.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All information contained in the report will be made available electronically to faculty, staff, and administrators via the Ed Tech Blog and the public drive utilized by the college.</td>
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</table>
Blog reflections

As noted above, please post your Action Research Plan on your blog, and make every effort to read and review action research plans from at least two other blogs this week or by early next week.

The following has been posted to:

http://marthasellsactionresearch.blogspot.com/

This week has made me see that there should be even more attention to detail than I have made in the past. One thing that really stood out to me was to be very careful to check for biases. This is something that I believe we can get easily emmersed in if we are not careful. I believe everyone has their own way of thinking, and likes to do things the way they feel is best. Data can be used to support that. We must be sure our data within projects such as these does not become skewed to support what we want, but to support the true results.

I have been the lead on a great many projects over the years, but this type of research - giving it a name, Action Research - takes it up a notch. It provides more detail, more checks and balances, and more validity. I will definitely put this new knowledge to good use.