Week 5 Background – Exploring Ways for Continuous Improvement of your Action Research Project

By this week you should have had an opportunity to review your draft action research plan, confer with your site supervisor and reach consensus on your question(s) or topic(s) and design of your action research plan, and uploaded your draft action research plan into your intern plan in the electronic portfolio. This week you will examine and analyze some strategies for assessing your action research project.

You will also have an opportunity to reflect on lessons learned so far in developing your action research project. We will ask you to describe what you have learned about identifying, designing, planning, and beginning to implement your action research project.

Remember, your action research plan, process, progress and project may take several weeks or several months to complete. One of the key goals of this course is providing an effective blueprint, a how to conduct an effective action research project in collaboration with your site supervisor(s), peers, Instructional Associates, and university faculty.

Learning Outcomes:

1) Examine and analyze strategies to assess action research.
2) Reflect on lessons learned about developing an action research project.

Performance Outcomes:

1) Identify strategies for assessing action research.
2) Describe lessons learned about planning an action research project.
**Rubric**

Use the following Rubric to guide your work on the Week 5 Assignment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Accomplished</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action Research – Identifying quality indicators assessing action research</td>
<td>Students identify all five quality indicators and describe how each indicator may be used to assess and improve their actions research. To be accomplished, each student also discusses how he or she can use these indicators to improve their action research plan. (10 Points)</td>
<td>Student briefly identifies the five quality indicators, but does not discuss how the indicators may improve his or her action research plan. Student may receive one extra point if he or she describes how he or she may use the indicators to improve the action research. (5 – 9 Points)</td>
<td>Student only describes some of the quality indicators and does not discuss how the strategies may improve his or her action research plan. (0 – 4 Points)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Reflection</td>
<td>Students write a thorough reflection, at least one page in length, highlighting what has been learned in this action research course, and the student provides at least three references to course resources (e.g., lectures, readings, assignments, discussion boards, electronic searches, blogs, etc.) supporting their reflection. (3 Points)</td>
<td>Students provide a reflection describing what they learned in this course, but fail to provide adequate references supporting their reflection. Adequate references must include at least three references to course resources as sources of their learning. (2 Points)</td>
<td>Students provide a partial description of what they learned in the course but without any references to course resources. (1 Point)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment Mechanics</td>
<td>Responses are relevant to course content; no errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Students demonstrate proper APA style. (3 Points)</td>
<td>Responses are relevant to course content; few errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation. (2 Points)</td>
<td>Responses do not reflect knowledge of course content, lack clarity and depth, and/or include multiple errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. (1 Point)</td>
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</table>
Week Five Assignment, Part 1 – Assessing the quality of inquiry in your action research
In order to continually improve your action research project, the professors are suggesting that you identify and apply some strategies for ongoing assessment of your action research project. This activity should provide you with some strategies to address this ongoing review process. Please read Chapter 6, The Continuing Journey as “Head Learner,” in the Dana text, and carefully review the section “What Are Some Quality Indicators for Practitioner Research,” pp. 179 – 186. Identify each of the quality indicators and describe how this indicator will help you assess your action research.
Workspace
Complete your work for Part 1 of Assignment 5 below. The boxes will expand as you type.

Quality Indicator 1

**Context of Study** refers to the assurance of understanding “where you are coming from”. This indicator will reinforce that when someone is reading the results of your research, they understand all the factors that were included in gathering the research, and the who, what, when, where, and why of the study.

In my project, I will be sure to report the reason, who was involved in the cohort (students and instructors), who was involved in the data gathering, how the data was gathered, and how it was interpreted. This should eliminate confusion in reading the results.

Quality Indicator 2

**Wondering(s) and purpose** refer to the root of the research. This aspect is greatly detailed and “makes a convincing case for the wondering’s personal importance to the researcher” (Dana, 2009). In other words, the project is explained in laymen’s terms to justify the reasoning for the research and what is expected in the outcome.

When disseminating my research, I will be careful to make my purpose clear to others. I will do this by asking others to read the initial wondering, and to have them explain to me what they believe the purpose of the project to be. If they relay the same wondering with which I began, I will know I have stated the goal properly.

Quality Indicator 3

**Principal Research Design** reflects on the collection and analysis phase of the project. This is when you assure you have considered all possible methods of gathering data, and it is all “clearly explained and is a logical choice” (Dana, 2009) in gathering the data.

I believe a good way to do this is to work with those who have performed research in the past. A fresh pair of eyes is always a proven way to catch something you may have missed. Another way to do this is to perform a mini research – go through the steps with just two or three data points, and see if you can find any weaknesses in your plan, and adjust as needed. There is always room for improvement in any project.

Quality Indicator 4

**Principal-Researcher Learning** deals with the results of the research. In this phase, all findings must have data supporting or refuting the original thoughts. It must be very detailed and very honest. The findings will not only reveal what was learned, but a
personal reflection as well (Dana, 2009). This is the decision maker of the project. This is where we must honestly say whether or not the research proved us right or wrong, and whether we must move forward or abandon our theories.

My plan includes such a report, and I am going into this research with an open mind. I understand that all products do not do what they claim, therefore if the data I gather indicates we move forward we will do so. If it indicates we should cease use of Starfish, we will immediately begin searching for another solution to assist us in retaining these students. It is vital to the college to help these young people continue their education.

**Quality Indicator 5**

**Implications for Practice** will “detail examples of change” (Dana, 2009) made as a result of the action research plan. This part of the report will also indicate any new projects that may come in the future as a result of this research.

I am sure the plan I have developed will not be the end of this inquiry. I feel that if we are successful in determining the usefulness of the Starfish Retention product, we will continue to use the methods here in determining the same for future considerations as well. As a result of this course, I will welcome the challenge, and will enter the projects with confidence and assurance we are doing everything we can to use college funding in the most efficient and useful manner.

Remember in addition to identifying the quality indicator, be sure to describe any ways you might be able to use these indicators to improve your action research.
Week Five Assignment, Part 2 – Final Reflections

Write a reflection describing highlights of this course and include any insights from the following:

- Lectures
- Readings
- Searches, like electronic searches of topics and questions
- Assignments and activities
- Discussion Board
- Blogs

The reflection may be as long as needed, but should be at least one page in the assignment space below. Also be sure to provide accurate APA citations (e.g., if you reference a passage or quote from one of the texts be sure to give credit so readers may know the source of your citation).

Blog – You may wish to post some of your reflections or provide readers with insights into your future implementation of your action research project.
Well, what a great five weeks. It always amazes me when I think I know what something is, and then in one short week, bam – I see it as totally different. That is what happened this week. Growing up I knew what research was. It was boring reading, numbers, graphs, reports, more boring reading. Then more boring writing that no one would ever want to read. Not so! Put the word “action” in front of it, and research is a whole new ball game!

As stated in Leading with passion and knowledge: the principal as action researcher, one of the first things I read was “Action research refers to research intended to bring about change of some kind” (Dana, p.6). This statement did not mean a great deal to me at first reading. However, I understand it so much better now.

I have learned that when approaching an issue in which important decisions must be made, one must enter that decision making process with the necessary tools. Action research is one of these tools. It will methodically provide all the necessary information with which to make an informed and educated decision, as well as measurable justification for that decision. In this way, if ever questioned, the data is there to support that decision.

I have learned that there is no single way to gain consensus to gain buy-in when approaching a problem. There are various ways to work with others to choose which projects to implement. Force field analysis, the Delphi method and the nominal group technique are all strategies “for sustaining improvement while at the same time looking futuristically to prepare for the future” (Harris, Edmonson, Combs, 2010). Although I have used various versions of these methods, I have never seen them as methods for this purpose.

In addition, I have learned we must use qualitative and quantitative measurements to arrive at a final result of any research project. This course has taught me various methods to use in order to do this, and there is a process for conducting the research. The steps are laid out for us in Examining what we do to improve our schools: 8 steps from analysis to action. They include setting the foundation, analyzing the data, developing deeper understanding, engaging in self-reflection, exploring programmatic patterns, determining direction, taking action and sustaining improvement (Harris, Edmonson, Combs, 2010).

If this process is followed each time such research is needed, it will assure there are no areas left underutilized, and a true reading will be found on the research gathered. I plan to keep these methods as part of my tool kit in conducting business. There are many opportunities in my work to put this knowledge to good use. Now I feel confident that I will have a systematic approach to making smart, effective, knowledgeable decisions.

This information will be posted to my blog site at:
http://marthasellsactionresearch.blogspot.com/