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The Center for Collaborative Action Research@Pepperdine University

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The Center for Collaborative Action Research at Pepperdine University links educators, researchers, and community members with the goal of creating deep understanding of educational problems in a range of different contexts including but not limited to schools, and to encourage evidence-based reasoning to solve these problems. The Center shares collaborative action research projects and supports the development of "knowledge-building" communities making use of innovative technology tools (Bereiter, 2002). The goal is to share what others are doing to reinvigorate their workplace with the capacity to reflect and adapt to evolving needs. Taking advantage of the online format of this journal, we invite you to visit the Center for Collaborative Action Research (cadres.pepperdine.edu/ccar).

The Center provides support for both action researchers and those who teach action research. It was created as both a way to help action researchers share their work with a larger community and to help those new to action research to understand the methods and findings of action research. Action Research is the systematic, reflective study of one's actions and the effects of these actions in a workplace context. As such, it involves deep inquiry into one's professional action. At Pepperdine, action research is the central focus of the Masters in Arts in Learning Technologies program. In a one-year program, it is necessary to be strategic in supporting the transformation of students into action researchers. We are able to accomplish this by developing and using the social capital of the community (Lin, 2001). The action researchers whose work is published by the Center play central roles in the evolving community, leaving their "intellectual footprints" for those who approach action research from the first time. Contact between new and experienced action researchers is an effective strategy for understanding the process and learning from the findings. Thus, the Center seeks to create a "community of practice" around action research.

Each year the students and faculty select the best examples of action research presented at the Pepperdine Action Research Exhibition Conference (third Thursday & Friday in June).   The students whose action research was selected prepare their action research portfolios for a second level review by action researchers from the past class who serve on the editorial board of the Center. The published action research portfolios establish the standards for the incoming students. As part of the process of learning to be action researchers, new students analyze the literature reviews and discuss findings and their link to research questions. They are encouraged to look for researchers whose work is close to the problems they are experiencing, and to contact the action researcher to discuss their ideas with him or her. In this way, we help our past and current students to evolve identities as action researchers in a community where dialogue around methods, findings and outcomes is highly valued. The interest of the new students encourages our graduates to continue their cycles of action research. We teach action research as a set of tools for learning from and through practice and not something done once for a degree and forgotten. The Center serves both our current and past students to think of action research as a frame of mind, a way of learning from practice, and as membership in what Wenger (1998) refers to as a community of practice.

Action Research Resources

The Center is one of the initial resources our students use to develop their understanding of action research. They explore the Center resources, and use the network of links to other action research sites. The Center welcomes suggestions for links and partnerships with other universities or centers that support action research. The more each community of action researchers links to the other communities, the stronger the overall development of the field.   And we look forward to exchanging links with others who are working in the area of action research (send links to mriel@pepperdine.edu).

The peer-reviewed portfolios of action research provide results of this specific form of design research that can be used to help other action researchers to help formulate new plans. The research portfolios are arranged in two groups, action research in instructional settings with students, and action research within community and corporate settings with colleagues. They show a range of methods that have been used by researchers to solve problems that evolve as they investigate new approaches. For example, Anne Smith (2010) was concerned by a number of students in her classes who did just enough work to pass with a D, but not enough to be effective learners.   She decided to take away the option of a D grade in her

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classroom. She explained this process to students and parents as a first step to increasing the skills of her students. This change led to others. She changed her teaching to allow for multiple submissions of students work, a request of students. This resulted in a significant shift in her role. Using blogs to track students self-assessments, she found that students were making productive use of feedback. She developed her skill in using feedback to improve her students' writing skill. In a third cycle of work, she invited a student teacher to be a part of her experimentations about what forms of writing feedback were most effective.   In this project, listening carefully to students changed the teacher-student relationship and then providing them feedback and multiple chances to improve their writing led to improvement in the quality of their work.

Graduate students at Pepperdine develop their action research projects in learning circles with others working in very different contexts (Riel, 2010). Often there are parallels across the different settings that

provide the most interesting insights to researchers as they are working through the cycles of inquiry. For example, Dan Wood (2009) working to develop a community of practice in a corporate context, found, as Anne Smith did, that listening carefully to others reshaped his view of problem. Wood experimented with the introduction of a knowledge sharing tool to encourage the development of a community of practice. At first he was the advocate who wanted to put his ideas in place, not unlike the teacher who wants students to pay close attention to him or her. But as he developed his project, he came to see that strong listening skills and giving quality feedback were strategies that worked in his context as well. Rather then mapping out the course of change, he found that listening carefully to co-workers was essential for developing the change with, rather than for, co-workers. Often in action research attention to the perspectives of others changes the way people relate to one another.

The CCAR-Interact is a wiki-website for developing a community of practice around action research. A wiki is a webpage that has an edit option on each page. In this wiki there is also a discussion page attached to each of the webpages. These tools support the sharing of the instructional strategies and teaching tools. We welcome the sharing of teaching activities, curriculum, action research resources, and tools that provide support for action researchers.

We hope that the Center can play an important role in connecting the community of people engaged in action research or in supporting action researchers.

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