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Current themes in educational action research at the University of Tennessee

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Pamela Taylor Threatt entitled "Current themes in educational action research at the University of Tennessee." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Specialist in Education, with a major in Education.

Sherry M. Bell, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Kathleen Puckett, W. Jean Schindler
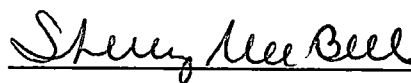
Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

To the Graduate Council:

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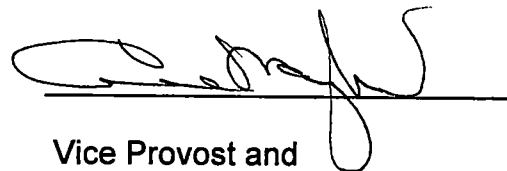Sherry M. Bell, Major Professor

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Current Themes in Educational Action Research
at the University of Tennessee

A Thesis
Presented for the
Educational Specialist
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Pamela Taylor Threatt
December 2001

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my best friend

Tim Threatt

for his daily support and sincere love.

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I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the professors on my committee, Sherry Bell, Kathleen Puckett, and W. Jean Schindler, for their constructive criticism and encouragement.

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Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to my family for their love, support, and encouragement. Thank you for always providing me with the opportunity to smile, and keep life in perspective.

Abstract

Action research projects are completed in conjunction with the internship year associated with the pre-service teaching interns. The action research project abstracts are published in the Capstone Conference handbook each year. These abstracts have been categorized from the years 1997 through 2001, within the fields of Grade level, Population, Educational Placement, Research Design, Content Area, and Theme/Intervention. Three raters utilized a database created in Microsoft Access to categorize data extrapolated from the Capstone Conference Handbook. Interrater reliability was established at 90% reliability.

The results were clearly identified. The prominent themes identified were Instructional Format, Other, Behavior/Classroom Management, Attitudes, and Academic Achievement. The prominent themes were then utilized as identifiers in an ERIC search to determine the representativeness in the broader professional literature. The similarity of representation between the categorized data and the professional literature was minimal.

The results of this study can be utilized by pre-service interning teachers as well as university mentors to shape future action research projects.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1

Introduction

The purpose of this research project is to review and explore recent trends and themes in action research in the field of education. Interning teachers in all pre-service training programs, preschool through high school and special areas, at the University of Tennessee are required to complete an action research project, in partial fulfillment of requirements associated with the internship year. The authors of the action research projects examine numerous topics in the educational arena; these projects involve the use of a number of interventions, and vary in target population. These action research projects are the primary focus of this study.

Background and Literature Review

There appears to be a gap in educational literature pertaining to trends and themes in action research. A thorough literature review indicates that few or no studies or reports on educational action research have focused directly on identifying trends and themes. The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), which contains the databases, Current Index to Journals in Education and Resources in Education were searched for studies on themes and trends in action research during the years 1966 through 2000. Professional literature on action research has focused on ideas about and responsiveness to participating in and incorporating action research into teachers' professional lives. However, no studies focusing on themes and trends were identified. It should be highly

beneficial to teacher educators and practicing teachers to know what is being researched to be aware of educational implications. Also, current action research should help determine the direction of future research studies or extended research on particular topics.

According to Allen and Calhoun (1998), action research is the process of evaluating or investigating educational decisions and practices. It also involves adjusting teaching practice accordingly, to maximize teaching effectiveness. It is a process for determining what works best in a specific educational environment. It includes exploring previous research on a topic and closely observing student outcomes. A goal of action research is to maximize student achievement. Action research projects stem from needs to improve teaching conditions or student learning associated with a particular educational setting. The teacher/researcher is an integral part of the research and learning process (McLean, 1995). Finally, action research is promoted as a process of individual reflection on teaching practice, which focuses to improve professional development.

Lewin first conceptualized action research in the 1940's (Smulyan, 1984). He explored social issues in the field of social psychology. His idea was to empower the practitioner and researcher in order to produce results in regard to social concerns. Corey adopted the idea of using action research in the area of education in the 1950's. He encouraged teachers and administrators to utilize action research in order to solve problems and improve practices in their own classrooms. Corey's concern was that information from the scientific method was not transitioning into teaching practice. According to Kyle and Hovda

(1987), Corey believed that the value of action research lay in the extent to which it led to improved practice. The generalizations, which emerged from action research applied to the present situation, rather than the broad representative population. During the 1970's, Stenhouse and Elliott suggested that it was possible to generalize the results of action research. Action research was then implemented to improve practice and provide teachers with a greater understanding of the teaching/learning process. According to Thiessen et al., (1992) there are four phases in the action research process: planning, action, observation, and reflection.

Allen and Calhoun (1998) in association with the University of Georgia's League of Professional Schools and the Ames Community Schools conducted an ongoing inquiry that had made a commitment to doing schoolwide action research. This project spanned six years of action research participation. Allen and Calhoun focused on the understanding of practices and obstacles faced by schools and organizations utilizing action research. The conclusions that were generated by Allen and Calhoun's efforts are as follows: 1) convincing people of a schoolwide focus is difficult, 2) teachers feel threatened by focusing on instructional issues, 3) teachers feel confident in using an intuitive approach to determine the effectiveness of a lesson, 4) action research is defined in various ways, 5) schools that made the most progress had the most technical assistance and staff development, 6) school administrators worked closely with action research teams, 7) schools which had internal and external facilitators benefited while conducting action research, 8) positive changes took place in schools

where action research was incorporated school wide. Allen and Calhoun concluded that the implications of their study suggest that conducting schoolwide action research is extremely difficult and complex. The benefits may elude the participating school if it is not prepared to invest time and resources.

Van-der-Westhuizen (1993) reported on issues and trends emerging from action research in South Africa. Action research projects, which were the focus in this report, were identified by searches utilizing computerized databases. From the identified action research projects, some were selected based on access to formal reports describing the projects, rationale, and methodology. The areas focused on were stated purposes/goals, methodology used, and main findings. The majority of the purposes/goals were categorized as serving technical interests in the form of effective teaching. There were various methodological design characteristics in common. Van-der-Westhuizen (1993) reported that all of the projects utilized facilitators and followed the action research cycle of plan, act, observe, and reflect. Research questions were based on perceived issues from personal experience. However, these research questions were then shaped according to a broader project in which the teacher/researcher was participating. Some examples of the findings include new methods for the teaching of reading, the value of teachers working together, action research methodology, and developing a better understanding of subject matter.

Caffarella completed a research project in the area of educational technology, which appears to be similar to this project in methodology. Caffarella

(1998) categorized a wide variety of topics being investigated in the form of doctoral dissertations, between 1977 through 1997. The Caffarella project, in addition to categorizing topics, identified trends and methodologic trends being researched in the area of Educational Technology. Dissertations were coded using multiple coding points to identify the major themes and constructs within the field. Data were extracted from the dissertations to identify both major trends and themes. He reported a variety of topics being investigated by students in educational technology and that there were several prominent themes in the data.

Purpose

There is a need to generate categorical information in the area of educational action research. This information will serve as a resource for educators engaging in action research and as a model and point of comparison for other, larger scale studies. The purpose of this project is to analyze action research completed at The University of Tennessee, College of Education, between the years 1997 and 2001, specifically focusing on the evolution of themes in action research.

Research Questions

The specific research questions identified for this project are: 1) What are the current trends in educational action research projects at the University of Tennessee? 2) What are the current trends specifically in special educational action research projects at the University of Tennessee? 3) Have the themes changed over the past 5 years? 4) What are the common types of research

methodologies? 5) Are the themes identified in the action research projects at the University of Tennessee similarly represented in the broader professional literature?

Chapter 2

Methodology

Abstracts are generated for all action research projects completed by pre-service training teachers from the University of Tennessee in compliance with requirements of the internship year. The abstracts have been compiled into book format each academic year after the action research conference, Intern Capstone Conference, held by the University of Tennessee.   This research included the abstracts from the 1997 through 2001 conferences.

Categorization of Abstracts

Each abstract book was reviewed and each abstract assigned an identifying number and categorized. The defined categories consisted of the following: grade level (early childhood, elementary school, middle school, high school, undetermined), subject/content (arts, language arts/spelling, mathematics, multiple subjects, other, physical education, reading, science/health, social studies, undetermined, and vocational/technical), research design (case study, experimental/quasiexperimental, N of 1, open ended interview/narrative, survey/questionnaire/interview, undetermined), educational placement (general education, gifted, inclusion, other, residential, resource, self-contained), population (ADHD/ADD, deaf education, general/not specified, gifted, other, special education-mild, special education-severe, special education-undetermined), theme/ intervention (academic achievement, alternative programming, assessment, attitudes, behavior/classroom management,

character education, cooperative learning, grades, inclusion, instructional format, motivation, multiple intelligences-learning styles, other, parents, self-esteem/self concept, study skills/work habits, technology), and year action research was completed. Table 1 is a list of the categories, sub-categories and definitions. The definitions of research designs for this project are based on general definitions from Applying Educational Research (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999).

Raters categorized each abstract into a database developed using Microsoft Access. A snapshot of the database interface is shown in the Appendix. Microsoft Access is database software. Each abstract was coded in each of the categories. Abstracts could be assigned to more than one code in each category. The raters (the author and two professors, each with at least five years directing action research) identified the six categories and sub-categories above based on the characteristics of a random sample of twenty-five abstracts from the five years represented in the study. A random sample of abstracts was reviewed by the raters to establish consistency in rating all categories. After the abstracts were categorized, a random sample was reviewed to establish inter-rater reliability. The abstracts were analyzed using categorical and descriptive analyses to extrapolate the desired thematic information.

Data extracted from the database included category to category and sub-category to sub-category relationships and trends. The extraction of data was guided according to the established research questions.

Table 1 - List of categories, sub-categories and definitions.

Category	Sub-category	Definition
Design of Research Study	Case Study	In-depth study in its natural context and from the perspective of the participant.
	Experimental/Quasi-experimental	Administration of an intervention and comparison of results across groups or via pre-test and post-test.
	N of 1	Administration of an intervention to one individual or small number of individuals with intervention completed one at a time.
	Open Ended Interview/Narrative	Administration of an interview, which provides the participants to answer freely in their own terms rather than selecting from a fixed set of responses.
	Survey/Questionnaire/ Interview	Administration of an instrument to elicit a response from a fixed set of responses.
	Undetermined	Inability to extract the desired information from the abstracts provided.
Educational Category	General	The regular education setting.
	Special (Gifted)	Placement that provides accelerated or enriched instruction.
	Special (Inclusion)	Educational environment where special education students are educated in the regular education environment.
	Special (Other)	Educational environment other than general, gifted, inclusion, residential, resource, or self-contained.
	Special (Residential)	Educational environment where housing is provided for students.
	Special (Resource)	Educational environment where mildly impaired special education students are educated in a room separate from the regular education setting.
	Special (Self-contained)	Educational environment where severely impaired special education students are educated in a room separate from the regular education grouping.
Population	ADHD/ADD	Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder/Attention Deficit Disorder (ADHD/ADD): an individual identified as having a medical condition impairing ones ability to self-control.
	Deaf Education	One who is hard of hearing or deaf.
	General/Not Specified	Refers to the regular education grouping or not enough information available to extract the desired from the abstracts.
	Gifted	Educational group identified as requiring gifted instruction.
	Other	Educational group other than the ones identified.
	Special Education (mild)	One who is identified as mildly impaired.
	Special Education (severe)	One who is identified as severely impaired.
	Special Education (undetermined)	Inability to extract the desired information from the abstracts provided.

Table 1 - continued.

Category	Sub-category	Definition
Grade Level	Early Childhood (thru K)	Pre-kindergarten through Kindergarten.
	Elementary (1-5)	First grade through fifth.
	High School (9-12)	Sixth grade through eighth grade.
	Middle School (6-8)	Ninth grade through twelfth grade.
	Undetermined	Inability to extract the desired information from the abstracts provided.
Subject Matter	Arts (Music, Fine Art)	Includes music and fine arts.
	Language Arts (Spelling)	Includes spelling and English.
	Mathematics	General mathematics content.
	Multiple Subjects	Combination of two or more subjects, generally thought of in regard to early childhood instruction.
	Other	Any subject not pre-identified.
	Physical Education	General physical education content.
	Reading	Includes reading content and phonics.
	Science (Health)	General science content, including health.
	Social Studies	Social studies content.
	Undetermined	Inability to extract the desired information from the abstracts provided.
	Vocational/Technical	Trade instruction in vocational or technical areas.
Theme/ Intervention	Academic Achievement	Achievement or performance academically.
	Alternative Programming	Any programming which is not the standard i.e. year-round scheduling.
	Assessment	Testing or evaluating methods or instruments.
	Attitudes	Thoughts and/or opinions.
	Behavior/Classroom Mgt	Methods of group management/control.
	Character Education	The instruction related to integrity and respect.
	Cooperative Learning	Small groups or pairs of students working together to complete a learning task.
	Grades	Scores received for academic work.
	Inclusion	The premise of special education students being educated in the regular education environment.
	Instructional Format	The action or practice of implementing a general plan of organization, arrangement, or choice of material during the planning of a lesson or intervention.
	Motivation	Stimulus to participate in an activity or learning task.
	Multiple Intelligences (Learning styles)	The use of one or more of Gardner's identified learning styles.
	Other	Any theme/intervention not pre-identified.
	Parents	Any mention of parental involvement.
	Self Esteem/Self Concept	The self-worth or self-respect of students.
	Study Skills/Work Habits	Homework completion or practice.
	Technology	Utilization of computers or technology instruction.

Representativeness of Themes in Broader Professional Literature

To determine representativeness of the currently identified themes in the professional literature, a search of ERIC was conducted. Specifically, the top five themes identified in the University of Tennessee action research projects were used as identifiers in a search of ERIC English language journals and documents in the years 1997-2001. Numbers were compared to determine relative representativeness.

Chapter 3

Results

The abstracts from the Capstone Action Research Conference Handbook were utilized as the primary information source for categorical purposes. The abstracts were obtained from the 1997 through 2001 conference handbooks.

A database for the collection of the abstracts was established using Microsoft Access. The abstracts were categorized into 6 fields. The fields were as follows; Grade, Population, Educational Placement, Research Design, Content Area, and Theme/Intervention. Frequently abstracts were coded multiple times per category, due to the multi-dimensionality of the abstracts. For 1,458 abstracts, there were 2,360 categorized entries among the 17 themes. Multiple themes and research designs were present in some abstracts. Due to the absence of information or the ambiguous nature of some of the abstracts, a portion of the data was categorized as "Undetermined" in many of the fields. Data were extracted from the database to address designated research questions. Refer to aggregated table in Appendix.

Current trends in Educational Research at the University of Tennessee

Research Question 1 focused on current trends in educational research at the University of Tennessee. The current trends associated with the action research projects are clearly defined. For the years 1997, 1998, and 1999, the prevalent theme was Other, followed by Instructional Format. In the years 2000

and 2001, the prevalent theme was Instructional Format, followed by Other. Table 2 is a summary of the five most prevalent themes and their occurrence per year. The theme/intervention of Instructional Format refers to the action or practice of implementing a general plan of organization, arrangement, or choice of material during the planning of a lesson or intervention. The category of Other consists of any theme that was not identified prior to the initiation of the categorization. This is a broad theme consisting of a vast array of teaching foci. Examples of prominent themes in the Other category are gender and perceptions.

Themes Within the Field of Special Education

Research Question 2 focused on current trends specifically in the field of special education. Within the categories of Educational Placement and Population, the prominent placement and population was General/Not Specified in both cases. These categories yielded 91.18% and 86.78% respectively of the total records categorized. Themes within the Special Education Placement and Special Education Population categories were analyzed. The fields of Special Education Placement and Special Education Population were associated primarily with the theme/intervention of Instructional Format, Behavior/Classroom

Table 2 - Occurrences of the five most prevalent themes per year.

Year	Instructional Format	Other	Behavior/Classroom Management	Attitudes	Academic Achievement
1997	53	98	37	43	10
1998	77	84	47	39	18
1999	78	103	45	29	22
2000	176	87	69	84	103
2001	152	92	52	21	46

Management, Other, Academic Achievement, and Attitudes. Table 3 and Table 4 summarize the five most prevalent themes and their occurrence per Special Education Placement and Special Education Population respectively. Special Education Placement had several themes, which were not in the top five themes of the General/Not Specified sub-category or heavily researched. They were Alternative programming, Character Education, and Multiple Intelligences.

Of interest, within the Special Education Placement category, Inclusion was the largest category with 26.36% followed by Special Other with 24.03%. In the sub-category of Special Education Population, Deaf Education was the most prevalent with 31.94% followed by Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder/Attention Deficit Disorder with 18.85%.

Table 3 - Occurrences of the five most prevalent themes per Special Education Placement.

Education Placement	Instructional Format	Other	Behavior/Classroom Management	Attitudes	Academic Achievement
Special (Gifted)	3	1	0	1	0
Special (Inclusion)	6	9	6	2	8
Special (Other)	22	11	7	4	2
Special (Residential)	10	6	1	2	3
Special (Resource)	6	1	4	0	9
Special (Self-contained)	5	8	8	1	1

Table 4 - Occurrences of the five most prevalent themes per Special Education Population.

Special Education Population	Instructional Format	Other	Behavior/Classroom Management	Attitudes	Academic Achievement
ADHD/ADD	9	5	24	0	3
Deaf Education	33	27	9	6	9
Gifted	4	2	2	1	0
Other	5	3	1	0	0
Special Education (mild)	19	0	4	4	6
Special Education (severe)	3	7	8	2	1
Special Education (undetermined)	12	9	10	0	8

Thematic Changes

Research Question 3 focused on changes in the themes over the past 5 years. In addition to the Instructional Format and Other categories, consistent themes, which were the primary focus of action research projects, were Behavior/Classroom Management and Attitudes. These themes were plotted between 21 to 84 occurrences each year categorized. Academic Achievement category fluctuated from 10 to 103 occurrences each year categorized.

Themes, which were researched less frequently, were Inclusion, Character Education, Self Esteem, and Technology. A theme, which was not researched as much during the years of 2000 and 2001 as during the years 1997, 1998, and 1999, was technology.

Common Types of Research Methodologies

Research Question 4 focused on the identification of current research designs being utilized by the pre-service teaching interns in their action research projects. Undetermined was the most abundantly identified research design across themes with 557 occurrences or 38.2% of the total. Survey/Questionnaire/Interview were utilized with 492 occurrences or 33.7% of the total, followed by Experimental/Quasi-experimental with 232 occurrences or 15.9% of the total. N of 1 design was identified with 94 occurrences or 6.4% of the total. Open Ended Interview/ Narrative and Case Study had 72 and 75 occurrences or 4.9% and 5.1% respectively, Figure 1. The theme Instructional Format yielded the following prevalent designs, Survey/Questionnaire/Interview and Experimental/Quasi-experimental.
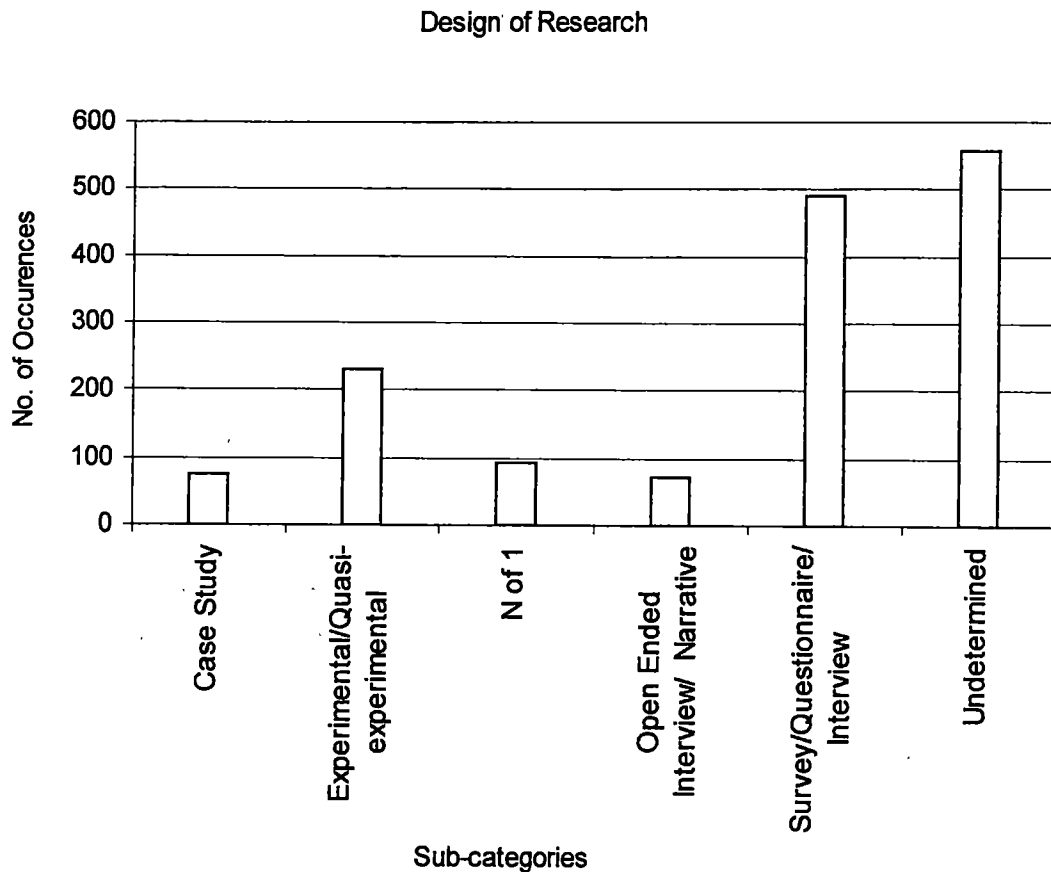
No. of Occurences

600	
500	
400	
300	
200	
100	
0	

Case Study — Experimental/Quasi-experimental — N of 1 — Open Ended Interview/ Narrative — Survey/Questionnaire/ Interview — Undetermined

Sub-categories

Figure 1 - Number of occurrences for Design of Research

Representativeness in the Broader Professional Literature

Finally, Research Question 5 focused on the similarity of representation

between the projects conducted at the University of Tennessee and in broader

professional educational research. To determine representativeness of the

currently identified themes in the professional literature, a search of ERIC was

conducted. The five themes, which were prominent in the data from the

University of Tennessee action research projects were used as identifiers in a

search of ERIC English language journals and documents in the years 1997-2001. The category "Other" was omitted from this search because of its ambiguousness. Another limit set on the ERIC search was action research as a qualifier. Instructional Format received 102 occurrences, Behavior/Classroom Management received 11 occurrences, Attitudes received 235, Academic Achievement received 87, and Motivation received 107 occurrences. Synonyms used in the ERIC search for Instructional Format were teaching methods and teaching strategies. A total of 1,022 articles and documents involving action research were found via the ERIC search for the years 1997-2001.

The following numbers were generated from categorization of the University of Tennessee action research projects; Instructional Format received 536 occurrences, Other received 464 occurrences, Behavior/Classroom Management received 250 occurrences, Attitudes received 216, Academic Achievement received 199, and Motivation received 123 occurrences. The representativeness between the ERIC search and the University of Tennessee action research projects do not appear to be similar, Table 5. The Instructional Format category and the Behavior/Classroom Management category comprised much higher percentages of the University of Tennessee action research projects while Attitudes comprised a relatively higher percentage of the ERIC journal articles and documents.

Reliability

Each rater reviewed a common pre-selected random sampling of twenty-five categorized abstracts to establish consistency in ratings. Once the abstracts were categorized, the author's ratings served as the standard against which the other ratings were compared. On a random sampling of ten abstracts, interrater reliability was established at 90% with one rater and 76% with the other rater. The latter's rater's ratings were re-coded by the author; a final random sampling of 5 abstracts yielded reliability of 90.6%.

Table 5 - Representativeness of UT abstracts compared to ERIC search.

Theme/Intervention	Percent of occurence (%)	
	UT abstracts	ERIC
Academic Achievement	13.6	8.5
Attitudes	14.8	22.9
Behavior/Classroom Mgt	17.1	1
Instructional Format	36.7	9.9
Motivation	8.4	10.5

Chapter 4

Discussion

During this study, 2,360 categorized themes were yielded from the 1,458 abstracts. The prominent themes identified during this study of action research projects were Instructional Format with 556 occurrences, Other 464 occurrences, Behavior/Classroom Management with 250 occurrences, Attitudes with 216 occurrences, and Academic Achievement with 209 occurrences. These five themes comprise 71.8% of the total categorized themes/interventions.

Instructional Format

The theme/intervention of Instructional Format is a broad theme. It encompasses many teaching strategies or methods. Examples of these are math-fact drill activities, team teaching, one-on-one instruction, pre-teaching, concept mapping, etc. Strategies which were topics of action research projects were too numerous and varied to list. However, it appears that the interns are focused on improving their own teaching and this is how they are exploring what works best for them individually. It seems reasonable that the Instructional Format category, due to its wide scope, would yield a large percentage of the total. After all, the primary purpose of the internship experience is to expand the teaching strategies and effectiveness of teaching methods utilized by interning teachers.

Other

The Other category yielded a large percentage of the themes during the categorization. The Other category was a composite of many themes/interventions, which were not identified prior to coding. The prevalent themes/interventions, which were noticed post categorization were gender, perceptions, and after school employment.

Behavior/Classroom Management and Attitudes

Behavior/Classroom Management was the third prominent category. It is not surprising that this category received so many occurrences. Classroom management is typically one of the primary concerns of new teachers.

Attitudes were explored from students and teacher perspectives. Typically, attitudes were surveyed regarding ideas of dress codes, testing methods, teaching methods, use of technology, and/or extra-curricular activities.

Academic Achievement

Academic Achievement was a broad theme also. Academic Achievement was identified in regard to the success in a reading program, the effects of after school employment on academic success, peer tutoring, etc. This theme appeared to be connected to other themes in abstracts. It seems that this category could have received more occurrences if the abstracts had been more explicitly worded.

General Discussion

Action research projects have the ability to increase an interning teacher's knowledge and ability to problem solve. The projects reviewed are promising in that they teach the interns to problem solve using professional literature as a basis but the interns may need more guidance in clearly defining, executing, and discussing their projects. This is evident in many of the abstracts, where data are not clear or omitted. The mentoring professors guiding the interns through the action research projects may need to provide explicit guidelines or practice prior to the initiation of an action research project.

Hopefully, teachers will find new opportunities for professional growth and further their knowledge and experience in action research projects. Interning teachers have the capacity to learn and further their professional knowledge by utilizing action research projects during their intern experience. It seems that the interning teachers have an interest in instructional strategies or instructional methods and are experimenting with them. This will broaden their scope of teaching strategies.

Behavior management also appears to be of concern to both special education and regular education teachers. However, it is surprising that the special education interns focused little on multiple intelligences or grades.

The representativeness of the action research projects to the broader professional literature is weak. This may be due to the fact that action research projects that are being completed by professional teachers are probably not being published by the researching teacher. Various researching teachers may

code the themes/interventions that were used as identifiers during the ERIC search differently also. In addition, the term "action research" was used as an identifier in the ERIC search. Certainly, many articles dealing with the themes identified in this study are being published in professional education literature. However, studies reporting action research on these themes are sparse.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this research project is the lack of information provided in many of the abstracts in the Capstone Conference Handbook. In many cases, it was difficult to extrapolate the desired information from the abstracts. It seems, from the categorized abstracts, that the pre-service teaching interns have limited working knowledge or understanding of research design and many of the abstracts failed to describe the population, intervention or topic and findings in sufficient detail to fully understand the project.

Another limitation is the difficulty in consistently categorizing the abstracts. Themes and interventions need to be explicitly defined prior to the categorization process. Reliability was eventually established at approximately 90% agreement with the primary rater. Reliability could perhaps be enhanced by more explicit definitions within each category.

Despite these limitations, this study is important for numerous reasons. One reason is that it identifies a need for pre-service interning teachers to be more explicit in describing, and perhaps, in designing their action research projects and studies. Findings could be used to provide direction for future action research projects, both for the interning teachers and for their university mentors.

Implications

If this study were to be extended, a possible avenue would be to broaden the themes and interventions category in order to be more detailed and inclusive. It would be interesting if this study were replicated in the future and results compared to determine the trend or change in themes, both at the University of Tennessee, but also in the broader professional literature.

This research yielded several themes that were not explored extensively. Multiple areas in which there are researchable problems that can be researched readily in schools were identified. It appears that teachers are not formalizing their action research projects.

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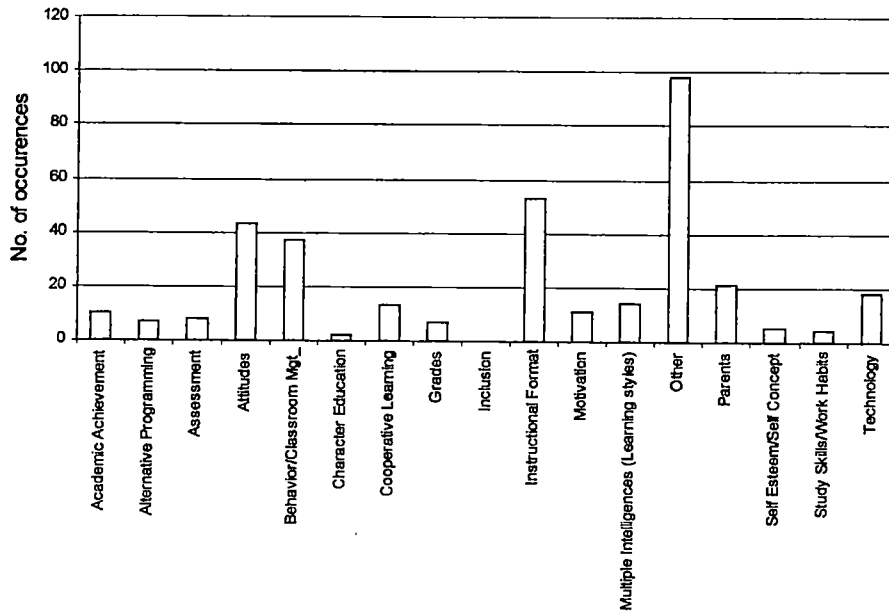
Appendix

Snapshot of the database interface

|		Academic Achievement	Alternative Programming	Assessment	Attitudes	Behavior/Classroom Mgt	Character Education	Cooperative Learning	Grades	Inclusion	Instructional Format	Motivation	Multiple Intelligences (Learning styles)	Other	Parents	Self Esteem/Self Concept	Study Skills/Work Habits	Technology
Grade Level	Early Childhood (thru K)	8	3	3	7	23	1	4		3	43	6	4	47	10	1	1	6
	Elementary (1-5)	76	7	8	75	115	11	24	15	1	226	48	28	129	35	14	19	15
	High School (9-12)	63	10	20	66	24	1	23	21	3	94	35	25	126	8	2	13	19
	Middle School (6-8)	12			23	21	1	14	9	2	44	16	4	38	3	1	10	9
	Undetermined	40	11	15	45	67	5	15	17	1	129	20	27	124	24	8	9	29
Subject Matter	Arts (Music, Fine Art)	6		2	8	7	1	2	1		20	3	8	18	1	1	2	2
	Language Arts (Spelling)	30	5	1	40	7	3	9	7		92	15	14	44	4	4	6	15
	Mathematics	39		3	24	7		9	8	1	72	10	5	18	3		2	9
	Multiple Subjects	1		1		1				1	4	1		4				
	Other	7	2	1	11	5	1	2		1	18	4	1	16	2		3	17
	Physical Education	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Reading	32	1	2	33	4	2	6	1		148	21	6	53	18	4	1	1
	Science (Health)	24		10	30	2		14	14	2	56	11	5	38		1	4	2
	Social Studies	9	3	1	5	4		5	9		32	8	6	16	2		2	4
	Undetermined	51	20	25	64	213	12	32	22	5	92	47	42	245	50	16	32	25
	Vocational/Technical				1			1			2	3	1	12				3
Design of Research Study	Case Study	13	1	1		26		1	2	1	21	3	1	22	4	1	2	2
	Experimental/Quasi-experimental	53	1	6	20	35	5	13	13		135	22	11	44	8	3	16	6
	N of 1	8		1	1	40		4	3	1	46	10	3	9	2		7	1
	Open Ended Interview/Narrative	4	2		8	10		6		1	20	8	2	27	7	4		3
	Survey/Questionnaire/Interview	51	10	20	136	44	11	26	16	5	135	39	30	187	41	10	8	27
	Undetermined	70	17	18	51	95	3	30	28	2	179	41	41	175	18	8	19	39
Educational Category	General	176	31	45	206	224	19	72	61	1	484	116	88	428	72	22	47	74
	Special (Gifted)				1						3	2		1			1	2
	Special (Inclusion)	8		2	6				1	7	6	2		9	1	2	3	
	Special (Other)	2		1	4	7		1		1	22			11	4			
	Special (Residential)	3			2	1		4			10	2		6	3	1		1
	Special (Resource)	9				4		1			6			1			1	
	Special (Self-contained)	1			1	8		2		1	5	1		8		1		1
Population	ADHD/ADD	3				24		1			9	2	1	5	2		1	2
	Deaf Education	9	2		6	9		6		2	33	3	5	27	6	1		1
	General/Not Specified	172	29	45	203	192	19	68	59	1	451	110	82	411	69	23	48	73
	Gifted				1	2		1			4	2		2				1
	Other					1			1		5	1		3				
	Special Education (mild)	6			4	4		3			19	4				1	3	
	Special Education (severe)	1			2	8		1		3	3	1		7		1		
	Special Education (undetermined)	8		1		10			2	4	12			9	3			1
Year	1997	10	7	8	43	37	2	13	7		53	11	14	98	21	5	4	18
	1998	18	4	7	39	47		9	13		77	27	18	84	22	6	17	10
	1999	22	5	9	29	45	4	18	9		78	22	15	103	13	6	6	13
	2000	103	4	17	84	69	6	23	28	3	176	34	26	87	13	4	14	26
	2001	46	11	5	21	52	7	17	5	7	152	29	15	92	11	5	11	11

Sub-category to sub-category relationships with respect to Theme/Intervention
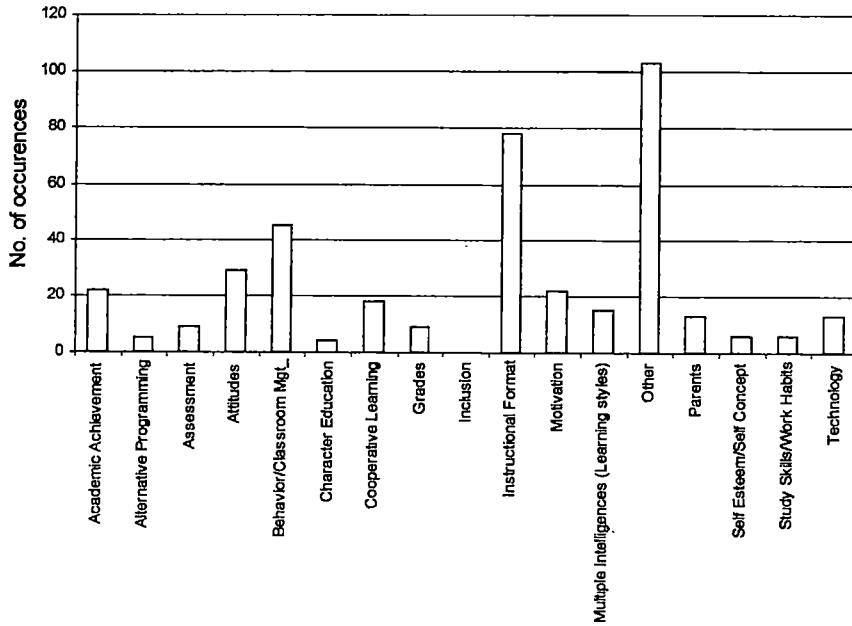
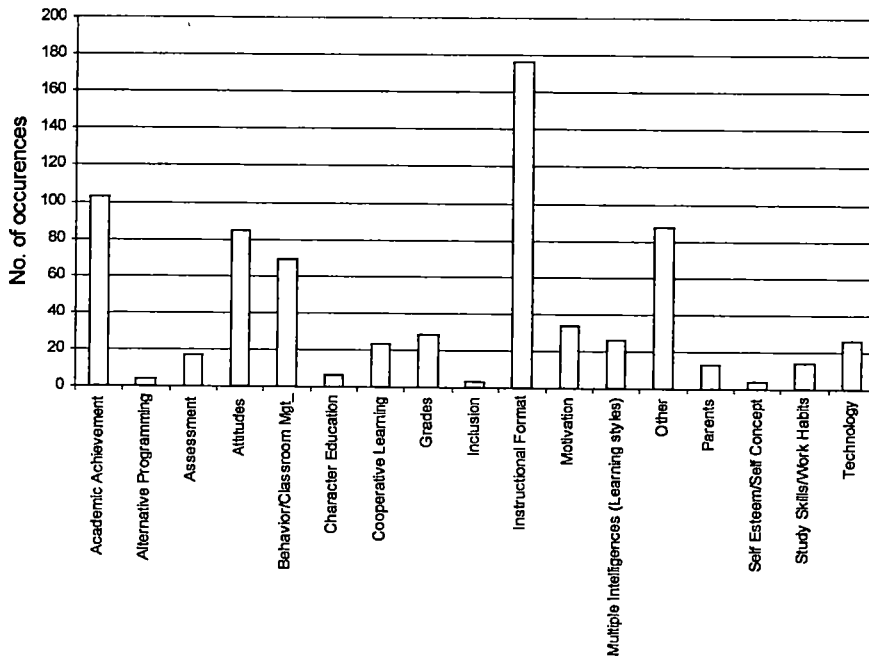Themes for 1997
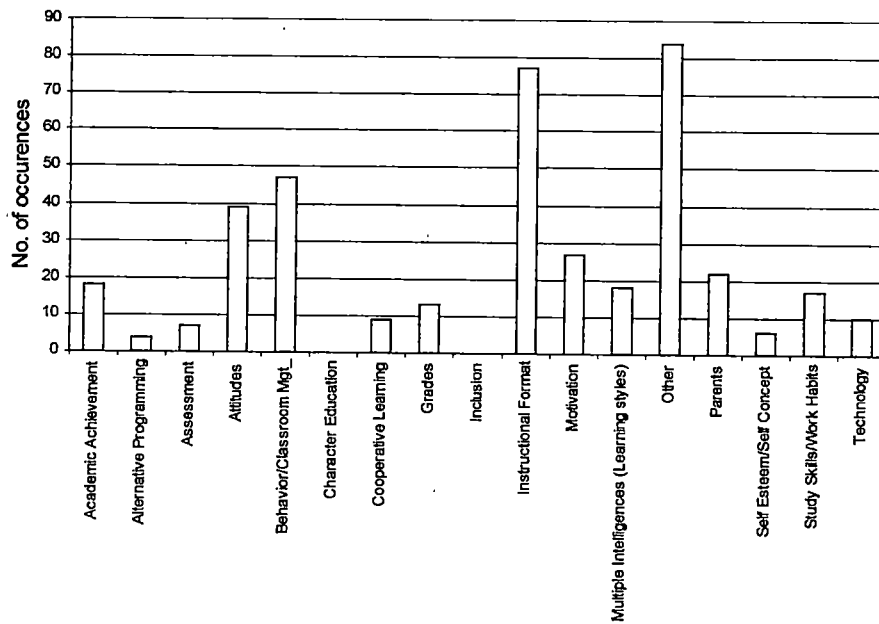
Themes for 1998

Trend of Themes/Interventions for 1997 and 1998

Themes for 1999
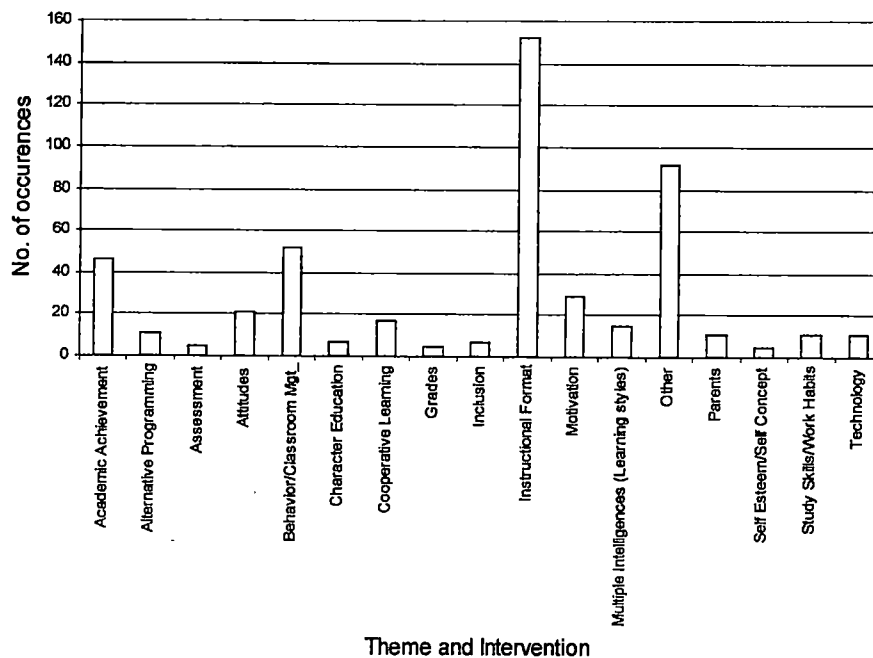

Themes for 2000

Trend of Themes/Interventions for 1999 and 2000

31

Themes for 2001

Trend of Themes/Interventions for 2001

Vita

Pamela Taylor Threatt was born in Erin, Tennessee on August 6, 1967. She attended schools in the public system of Stewart County, Tennessee, where she graduated from Stewart County High School in June 1985. She entered the University of Tennessee at Martin August of 1985 and later transferred to Murray State University August of 1988. She received a Bachelor of Science degree in Communication Disorders in 1990. In June 1990, she began a Master of Science program in Speech-Language Pathology at Murray State University, and received the degree in December 1992. After working eight years, she entered the Educational Specialist program at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. The Educational Specialist degree was received December 2001.

She is presently working as a Special Education teacher in Anderson County Public Schools at Norris Middle School.