Supporting Students Learning to Write an Action Research Report

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Introduction

Candidates for a Master’s Degree in Curriculum and Instruction (Site-based Delivery Model) complete a four-semester series of courses that emphasizes problem-based inquiry and action research in curriculum and instruction issues. During the second course in the sequence the focus is on learning to conduct action research in their classroom. This study compared the finished written action research report of one site (N = 29 students) with a second site (N = 32 students). A rubric developed by the program faculty as a common assessment across all sites for this course was used to compare the quality of the written reports between the two groups.

Participants

The experimental group contains 29 students and 28 are full-time teachers and one student is a certified teacher but choosing to stay home until her child is of school age. The control group has 32 students and all of currently teaching in the classroom. Both groups contain students who are either teaching in the elementary, middle, of high school levels. Table 1 contains a summary of which levels the students teach in both groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Group 1 (Exp)</th>
<th>Group 2 (Control)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not currently teaching</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Levels students are teaching.

Instruments

A rubric to evaluate the quality of the written action research report was developed by the program faculty as a common assessment in this master’s program. The descriptive rubric contains the following elements: title, research question, description of study, subjects, procedures, informed consent, and overall clarity of report and format. Each element can be evaluated as exemplary, proficient, developing, or not accomplished. All elements must be evaluated at the exemplary of proficient level, or the section/s of the report that was scored at the lower two levels must be corrected and re-evaluated until a proficient or higher score is obtained.
Method

Each group has a different team of three instructors responsible for all instruction during the four-semester sequence. One of the three instructors is a university professor and one is an administrator from the host school or district. The third instructor is selected to complement the other two instructors. Both groups received comparable instruction in how to complete action research and the sequential steps involved. Both groups received instruction in completing an Institutional Review Board (IRB) application and how to develop appropriate research questions.

The experimental group was trained to use a web-based program that supports the development and reporting of action research. The URL is [http://www.altec.org/index.php](http://www.altec.org/index.php) which is the Action Research Network and its link is [http://actionresearch.altec.org](http://actionresearch.altec.org). This web-based program leads students through the steps of action research one section at a time. The sections are as follows:

1. Research problem
2. Context/Setting
3. Proposed intervention
4. Literature review
5. Data collection procedures
6. Data collection instruments
7. Raw data
8. Data Analysis
9. Data reflections

Each section provides questions and other supports to assist students in thinking through each section and what issues they should consider. Once students enter their text, instruments, data, and analysis for each section they can submit that section or sections for approval and feedback from the professor. One section can be completed, submitted and once approved the student can move on to the next section and repeat the steps. If a section is not approved the professor provides feedback and the student can revise and submit the next draft. The program color codes each step with blue representing a draft that is ready for review, green representing a draft that has been approved, and red representing a draft that needs to be revised and resubmitted. Data that is included in a text file, chart or graph can be linked to that section on the web-based program. Also instruments used in the action research can also be linked to the appropriate section and accessed by the professor for review. Once the report has been completed and approved the complete report can be printed by both the student and professor for evaluation.

Research Question

Can a web-based program for reporting action research questions, research design, results and discussion increase the skill levels of doing action research and the quality of the written reports.