


Conducting Research in Your Own Setting

A Case Study from
Project Literacy
Howard County Library



Project Literacy, HCL Presenters

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Objectives for This Workshop

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

1. Gain an overview of the process of conducting education research.
2. Use Project Literacy's research project as a case study that could inform their own organization's practice.



Project Literacy

Howard County Central Library

- We serve adults over age 21 with less than a high school diploma.
- Majority are people whose first language is not English.
- One-on-one tutoring at office done by volunteer and paid tutors. (Also, ESL and conversation classes)
- Four to six month waiting list for students to be paired with tutors. Instruction is matched to the needs of the students (CASAS).
- Students range from those with no literacy skills to students preparing to take entrance exams to begin the External Diploma Program.

4



Process of Conducting Educational Action Research

- Decide purpose of research
- Literature Review
- Research Plan
- Analyze the results
- Apply relevant results to program

5



A Quick Distinction

- Formal research written up in academic journals is designed so results can be generalized to a larger population.
- Action research is meant primarily for population on-site. Project Literacy's study was an action research project.

6



Purpose of Research

- What do you want to find out? Remember not to ask the questions if you don't want to know the answers.
- Project Literacy – Finding out the training/support needs and desires of the volunteer tutors.



Research Literature Review

- Check out relevant recent research to gain an understanding of the scope of the issue and insights on research methodology.
- University libraries often have access to databases like *Educational Research Complete*.
- Important journals in our field include *Adult Basic Education and Literacy Journal* and *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*.



Research Literature Review

- For Project Literacy's research, we looked at volunteer tutor training and research-based reading instruction.
- Key findings:
See attached article and literature review.



Designing the Research

- Quantitative – surveys, testing instruments. Statistical analysis.
- Qualitative – open-ended responses, interviews. Thematic analysis of written/oral responses.
- Mixed Methods – Trying to get the best of both worlds.

10



Designing the Research

- Project Literacy used a mixed methods survey, building upon a previous survey design.
 - Quantitative – Likert scale questions.
 - Qualitative – Open-ended written answers.

11



Designing the Research

Example Likert Scale Question: See attached survey

1 = Disagree strongly 4=Unsure (neither agree nor disagree) 7 = Agree strongly

1. I would like to know more about teaching Alphabets (identifying sounds in words and phonics).

In particular, I would like to learn about

So that: _____

12



Designing the Research

Example Qualitative Questions: See attached survey

1. Please list three aspects of your tutoring sessions that you find are most successful with your students:

- A.
- B.
- C.

2. Please list three challenges you have with your tutoring sessions:

- A.
- B.
- C.

3. What suggestions would you make to someone who is starting to tutor with Project Literacy?

13



Designing the Research

Some nuts and bolts:

- Ethics, e.g. organizational policy and assessing potential harm to participants.
- Confidentiality / Permission slips.
- Thank you gifts.

14



Analyzing the Results

- Quantitative analysis included putting Likert results into a spreadsheet and running low-level analysis. We looked for the mean, mode, median, range and used SPSS.

15



Major Quantitative Findings

- Ten out of 22 volunteer tutors completed surveys.
- The survey participants' experience in volunteer tutoring ranged from 2 months to 20 years and 9 months. The total time volunteered per month ranged from 4 hours to 13 hours with 8 to 10 hours being the most common.
- Overall, participants tended to view volunteering for Project Literacy as a positive experience. One indicated a preference for volunteering more hours. None wanted to reduce hours tutoring.

16



Major Quantitative Findings

Regarding desire for more training in aspects of reading, the results varied.

Aphabetics - mean was 4.43 with responses ranging from 2 to 7.

Fluency – mean was 4.7 with responses ranging from 3 to 7.

Vocabulary - mean was 5.4 with the responses ranging from 3 to 7.

Comprehension - mean of 5.4 with a range of 4 to 7.

Writing - mean of 4.88, with a range of 1 to 7 and a mode of 6.

17



Major Quantitative Findings

As for training, 9 of the 10 participants ranked their training preferences. (1 = most preferable, 5 = least preferable) Based on mean, training preferences were as follows:

1. One-on-One Coaching (mean 1.6, median 2, mode 1, range 1-5)
2. In-Service Training (mean 2.2, median 3, mode 1,3, range 1-4)
3. Online Training (mean 3, median 2, mode 2, range 1-5)
4. Study Circles (mean 3.5, median 4, mode 4, range 2-5)
5. Attending Conferences (mean 4.33, median 5, mode 5, range 2-5)

18



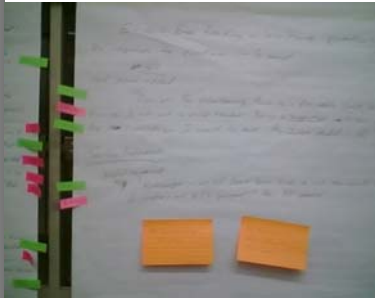
Analyzing the Qualitative Results

- Qualitative analysis –
 - Wrote out responses
 - Grouped responses into categories
 - Grouped categories into themes

This involved two long work sessions with the Instructional Specialist, Linda Kamosa, and the researcher, Cynthia Campbell.



Analyzing Qualitative Data





Our Instructional Specialist





Our Qualitative Findings

- Categories include *communication, technology, methods, student progress, relationship, training, creativity, flexibility, resources, and good of community.*



Our Qualitative Findings

Themes derived:

- 1. A key aspect of tutoring involves a relational investment in the student's progress which is seen as beneficial to the community as a whole.**



Our Qualitative Findings

Themes derived:

- 2. The tutors recognize and embrace the need for creativity and flexibility in their work, but they also know that they need to integrate consideration of the educational standards in their work.**



Our Qualitative Findings

Themes derived:

3. Tutors want training in teaching methods that will help *their students* to progress.



Our Qualitative Findings

Themes derived:

4. Technology is seen as a tool that can enhance communication among tutors, provide or enhance training, aid in understanding and effectively using Project Literacy's resources, and help students learn.



Applying Results

- Instructional Specialist applied some principles in her training program.
- Executive Summary which was shared with tutors.
- Redesign of resource area to make it easier to use.



What Did We Learn?

- What did we learn about our program?
- What did we learn about conducting action research?



Insights About Our Program *Cynthia Campbell*

- How much passion the volunteer tutors bring to their work at Project Literacy.
- The importance of enhanced communication within our organization. The volunteers appreciate having more experienced tutors help them in selecting resources.



Insights About Our Program *Linda Kamosa*

- Confirmation that the participating volunteer tutors find volunteering for Project Literacy to be a positive experience that utilizes their talents (I assumed this because they continue to volunteer, but I hadn't heard or seen it stated.)
- Recognition that the participating volunteer tutors feel supported and appreciated (I was hoping this was true but had no evidence.)
- Identification of one-to-one coaching as the preferred method of training



Insights About Our Program *Linda Kamosa*

Identification of specific needs:

- designing lessons
- understanding resources
- creating a tutor list-serve
- sample tests
- teaching skills.

31



Insights About Our Program *Linda Kamosa*

Specific areas of needs were also identified:

- Creativity
- Space constraints
- Schedules
- Motivation
- writing, spelling, and grammar.

(This tool served as a needs assessment useful for planning further interaction with the volunteers.)

32



Insights About Our Program *Linda Kamosa*

- Description of things the volunteer tutors consider successful aspects of their tutoring (This gives a picture of what they consider to be their strengths and is valuable because it is important to address weaknesses through strengths.)
- Description of volunteer tutors' suggestions for someone starting to tutor with Project Literacy (Some of these are already included in the volunteer orientation. Others could easily be incorporated.)

33



Insights About Our Program *Kiran Badwal*

- Volunteer tutors are very dedicated to the program and to helping their students succeed.
- Limited space in the office can make it hard for tutors to engage in more varied activities with their students.
- Volunteers ask us for more training in order to be better tutors.

34



What Did We Learn About Conducting Action Research? *Cynthia*

Campbell

- Careful planning is key.
- Communication is important.
- Follow-up needs to be more prompt.
- Perhaps Survey Monkey would have helped generate more responses.
- Statistical analysis help!

35



What Did We Learn About Conducting Action Research? *Linda Kamosa*

Participation in the process of identifying the four themes (This gave me the opportunity to understand and use the process along with insight into the volunteer tutors' thinking about their work and the progress of their students.)

36



What Did We Learn About Conducting Action Research?

Kiran Badwal

- More participation in the survey. Only ten out of twenty-two volunteers completed the survey.
- Frequently pleading with volunteers (in-person and via email) to consider participating in the survey.

37



What Did We Learn About Conducting Action Research?

Kiran Badwal

- Though survey results yielded a desire for more training, past experience has been lack of volunteer participation when additional training opportunities become available.

38



What Did We Learn About Conducting Action Research?

Kiran Badwal

- Some solutions volunteers suggested for improvement are not within the program's reach, such as creating an online tutor forum and database of resources, etc.
- A good opportunity to participate in an actual research project and to put theory into practice.

39



Resources:

Action Research: Teachers as Researchers in the Classroom, Second Edition by Dr. Craig A. Mertler, Sage Publications, 2008.

Educational Research: An Introduction (8th Edition) [Hardcover] by M. D. Gall, Joyce P. Gall, and Walter R. Borg, Allyn & Bacon, 2006.

Check out National Institute for Literacy at www.nifl.gov for a free on-line mini course on research. They also have a lot of great research articles.

40



Conclusion

This Action Research project has been a good learning experience for us. We are thankful for our volunteers who participated in this study.

We hope that our research experience can be helpful for you.

41



Contact Info

We're happy to answer questions and talk more with you:

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- Project Literacy Office:
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42
