

# **SOAR Research Proposal Summer 2012**

## **Teacher Action Research: Contemporary Leaders in Practitioner Inquiry and Their Epistemological Belief Systems**

### **Faculty Researcher**

Dr. Joseph M. Shosh  
Associate Professor of Education &  
Director, Master of Education Program in Curriculum & Instruction

### **Student Co-Researchers**

Valerie SanFilippo  
Undeclared, considering English major with secondary education certification  
Class of 2015

Brianne Schoolcraft  
Undeclared, considering English and Art double major  
Class of 2015

Project Duration: May 29 – August 3, 2012

### **Description of the Project**

In an era in which the value of teacher education is increasingly called into question (Levine, 2005, 2006, 2007; Chingosa & Peterson, 2011), teacher action research holds tremendous promise to improve classroom practice in ways that are far more authentic and meaningful than current positivistic value added measures required under NCLB, and more recently, the Obama administration's Race to the Top initiative (Shosh & Zales, 2005, 2007; Shosh, 2011, 2012). The SOAR summer 2012 research team will identify national and international leaders in teacher action research pedagogy, identify their epistemological and ontological belief systems, and conduct on-line survey and interview research (Kozinets, 2010) to determine if and how current practitioner inquiry leaders position their work as a clear and viable alternative to neo-liberal teacher accountability systems.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Research Team**

Week 1 [May 29 – June 1]: How are teacher research and practitioner inquiry defined?

- Read seminal works by Kurt Lewin, Lawrence Stenhouse, John Elliot, et al.;
- Write research briefs of key works.

Week 2 [June 4 – June 8]: What major contributions to the field of inquiry have been made subsequently by Americans Cochran-Smith & Lytle, Zeichner, & Connelly & Clandinin? Britons McNiff & Whitehead? Australians Kemmis & McTaggart? Others?

- Conduct an initial review of the literature;
- Write research briefs of key works;
- Draft HSIRB proposal and consent forms for survey/ SKYPE interviews of identified AR leaders attending Value and Virtue Conference in Practitioner Inquiry Conference, York St John University, York, England.

Week 3 [June 11 – June 15]: What new leaders have emerged, and what are their belief systems?

- Begin annotated bibliography of articles produced by contemporary leaders;
- Read and discuss Kozinet's (2010) *Netnography: Doing ethnographic research online*.

Week 4 [June 18 – June 22]: Where and in what types of educational programs is action research methodology the dominant feature of teacher education in American colleges and universities?

- Identify key centers of academic programs sponsoring teacher action research in the U.S.;
- Develop matrix and use for recording salient points for international comparison;
- Continue annotated bibliography of articles produced by contemporary American leaders.

Week 5 [June 25 – June 29]: Where and in what types of educational programs is action research methodology the dominant feature of teacher education in European and Australian/New Zealand colleges and universities?

- Identify key centers of academic programs sponsoring teacher action research in Europe, Australia, and New Zealand;
- Record salient points of European academic programs for international comparison;
- Continue annotated bibliography of articles produced by contemporary European, Australian, and New Zealand leaders.

Week 6 [July 2 – July 6]: Where and in what types of educational programs is action research methodology the dominant feature of teacher education in colleges and universities in Asian, Latin American, and African nations?

- Identify key centers of academic programs sponsoring teacher action research in Asian, Latin American, and African nations?;
- Record salient points of key international action research programs for comparison;
- Continue annotated bibliography of articles produced by contemporary leaders from Asian, Latin American, and African nations.

Week 7 [July 9 – July 13]: How have action research leaders positioned practitioner inquiry both in tandem with and in opposition to national and international calls for reform in teacher education?

- Distribute surveys and obtain participant consent from international leaders at York St John University's Value & Virtue in Practitioner Inquiry Conference;
- Conduct SKYPE interviews.

Week 8 [July 16 – July 20]: What do we learn from our interviews of international AR leaders?

- Compile and analyze survey data;
- Transcribe key passages of SKYPE interviews;
- Compose annotated bibliography entries for SKYPE interviews.

Week 9 [July 23 – July 27]: What do we learn from our interviews of international AR leaders? [continued]

- Code key ethnographic data;
- Conduct discourse analysis of key interview quotations;
- Identify preliminary theme statements.

Week 10 [July 30 – August 3]: In what key ways is action research currently positioned around the world to improve teaching and learning?

- Articulate SOAR study findings;

- Identify specific opportunities for publication and presentation;
- Develop Power Point presentation and poster of summer 2012 study and its findings.

### **Summary of SOAR Student Researcher Benefits**

- Opportunity to learn to engage in research of one's own professional practice as a first year traditional-aged college student in dialogue with another first year student under the direction of a professor with a record of publication and international presentation in this field of inquiry;
- Participation in the design and implementation of a small-scale ethnographic study from review of the literature, through the refinement of data collection plan, to the gathering and analysis of data, to the sharing of research findings;
- Enhanced understanding of practitioner inquiry theory and research methods;
- Opportunity to identify and interview via SKYPE key international leaders in action research theory and practice;
- Opportunity to report on the study and its findings at the University of Pennsylvania Ethnography in Education Research Forum, the American Educational Research Association convention, the Collaborative Action Research Network Conference; and/or the York St John University Value & Virtue in Practitioner Inquiry Conference;
- Opportunity to report on the study and its findings in a national or international peer-reviewed journal such as *Teaching Education*, *Teacher Education Quarterly*, *Journal of Action Research*, or *Educational Researcher*.

### **Budget Items**

Student Stipend of \$7.50 an hour for 40 hours per week for 10 weeks X 2 (\$6,000)

Student On-Campus Housing (College contribution)

Research Team Summer Reading (\$500) ← All materials to be donated to Reeves Library at conclusion of study

Faculty Supervision for Two Student Researchers (\$1,750)

Total Requested = \$8,250 plus On-Campus Housing for Two First Year Student Researchers

### **References**

- Chingosa, M. M., and Peterson, P.E. It's easier to pick a good teacher than to train one: Familiar and new results on the correlates of teacher effectiveness. *Economics of Education Review*, 30 (3), 449-465.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2010). *Netnography. Doing ethnographic research online*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Levine, A. (2005). *Educating school leaders*. Washington D.C.: Education Schools Project.
- Levine, A. (2006). *Educating school teachers*. Washington D.C.: Education Schools Project.
- Levine, A. (2007). *Educating researchers*. Washington D.C.: Education Schools Project.
- Shosh, J.M. (2011). A Meta-thematic analysis of teacher reflection in a graduate action research Program. Collaborative Action Research Network Conference. Vienna, Austria.
- Shosh, J.M. (2012). What do teachers learn conducting action research? A Meta-thematic analysis of one cohort's research efforts. *Action Researcher in Education* 3 (1), In Press.
- Shosh, J.M., & Zales, C.R. (2007). Graduate teacher education as inquiry: A case study. *Teaching Education*, 18 (3), 257-275.
- Shosh, J.M., & Zales, C.R. (2005). Daring to teaching writing authentically, K-12 and beyond. *English Journal*, 95 (2), 77-81.

Teacher Action Research: Contemporary World Leaders & Epistemological Belief Systems  
Valerie San Filippo, Undeclared (English with Secondary Education Certification), 2015  
Dr. Joseph Shosh  
On-Campus housing requested

The education of teachers is divided in its methods. This is, in part, due to the increased pressure of standardized exams and state and federal standards to which teachers are legally required to adhere. Many teacher education programs have felt so restrained by these requirements that they have forgone insightful teaching methods for those that act upon legal standards. However, some institutions have managed to work within a teacher's legal obligations while still creating a method by which teachers can create an enriching, personalized environment in which student may once again feel a joy in learning. With Dr. Joseph Shosh and the SOAR program I would like to help establish the criteria by which we can determine how institutions rank within their education programs.

During our research we would establish the parameter by which we will measure institutions as effective in the methods of critical teacher's education. By establishing these guidelines we would then be able to rate institutions and discover how to emulate the methods that allow for such successes. In doing this, we can determine of and how Moravian College ranks as an institution for teacher's education.

On a personal note, the establishment of criteria would help me become more aware of what works in teacher education and what doesn't, and in doing this I can learn fully what will be expected of me as a future teacher. Currently I have not been exposed to many education courses, and in researching how and why courses are effective, I would have a thorough understanding as to why I would be taking classes and what I should gain from them, so that I can hone specific skills I need to be a successful and conscientious teacher.

Furthermore, the research would allow me the opportunity to put my academic capabilities to the test. By gathering data through text and hands on experience such as interviews, I will be given the chance to draw conclusions that have not previously been made in textbooks. For the first time in my career I will be learning what others haven't, and pioneer research that will benefit not only me, but all teachers and consequentially all students. If strong enough material and methods are uncovered in this research, it is entirely possible that we could revise the teacher education system for the better.

It would be an honor and a privilege to do research in the name of Moravian College to enrich the education of students. If permitted, this research would allow me the liberty to explore education standards in a way that a typical student would be unable to, and I would be capable of assisting my peers and my future field. An impact such as this is not an opportunity often given to young students, but I hope to be given that opportunity.

Project title: Teacher Action Research: Contemporary World Leaders & Epistemological Belief Systems

Student: Brianne Schoolcraft

Major of student: Undeclared (considering English and Art double major)

Expected graduation date: 2015

Faculty mentor: Dr. Joseph Shosh

On-campus housing: Requested

The proposed SOAR project of Teacher Action Research: Contemporary World Leaders & Epistemological Belief Systems offers a chance for intellectual enlightenment not only for me as a student researcher, but on far-reaching levels as well, such as in the teaching community at Moravian and beyond. During the ten week program, our SOAR research team would be conducting research on the productivity and merit of teaching methods and how teacher action research provides a chance for teachers to improve the quality of their teaching and, by extension, the quality of the education of their students. Through extensive reading and analysis of works written by knowledgeable contributors to the field of action research, and by interviewing current leaders in the field, we will gain an in-depth understanding of how the method works, why it is so important to the improvement of the field of education, where it is currently being utilized in classrooms internationally, and how it compares to other teaching methods currently in use today. With this insight we will then be able to apply our research to identifying and ranking key areas of educational excellence in our own community and around the world.

The future quality of society depends on the education of future generations, an importance that cannot be stressed enough. Modern teaching is dominated by the demands of standardized exams, which often cause educators to prioritize in ways that may not necessarily benefit their teaching and their student's educations. Methods such as teacher action research, which strive to improve the way educators approach teaching, offer a possible answer to the difficult question of 'how can we make positive improvements to the field of education?' Teacher Action Research: Contemporary World Leaders & Epistemological Belief Systems and projects like it, that aim to understand what makes education truly effective and bring awareness to the subject, take the first step to creating positive change to the education system, which I believe is important.

I believe this program would benefit me tremendously in a variety of ways. As a student, the intensive research, critical thinking, and application of gained knowledge to confronting important questions that lay at the foundation of education, could have a long-lasting positive effect on my work. Not only will my research skills improve, the ways in which I apply critical thought to problem solving and my approach to clearly expressing and articulating my knowledge will also undoubtedly be strengthened. Perhaps most important of all, however, would be the project's influence on my own global-awareness. SOAR would allow me to improve not only intellectually, but in my world-view, so that I would be able to view society through a more analytical lens, better comprehend its structure, and better understand my connection to that structure and how I could possibly make a difference. The outcomes of this project have the potential to be numerous and great, and it would be a tremendous opportunity as a student to be a part of making something like this project, and its possible discoveries in the field of education it has the potential to discover, a reality.