

Action Research Plan – 2nd Draft Version 3

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Action Research Timeline Literature Review

PURPOSE:

The purpose of my action research to discover ways to cultivate the emergence of a community of practice that engages participants in thinking about education, technology, change, and our role(s) in providing auxiliary services to non-public schools. A central theme that will frame our interactions is educational technology. I will use both virtual and face-to-face collaboration efforts to assist me in this adventure. I will utilize this emerging Community of Practice to develop an understanding of this unique division, their desired opportunities, needs, barriers, and challenges.

WORK COMMUNITY CONTEXT:

I work for a Learning Education Agency (LEA) that functions at a level between the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the local school districts in the county. This agency encompasses all schools districts within our county and provides resources and leadership for these schools. Some of the services that the organization provide includes special education services, technology services, leadership training, professional development, business services, media services, and consulting services. Within that organization, I work for the Non-Public School Services Division (NPSS). My division provides remediation (reading and math) services along with other services (speech and counseling) to non-public schools in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. Of these services, our focus is reading literacy. We receive both federal and state funds for this purpose (one of very few states that receive public funding for non-public instruction).

The NPSS division serves 185 schools with an approximate enrollment of 35,000 students. These schools comprise both religious-affiliated school and independent non-religious affiliated schools. The schools are independent and are not bound by the same regulations and laws that public schools are. This provides a challenge as they all operate independently from each other with their own operating framework. Our staff members work within these schools to provide remediation and social services as necessary. Each staff member works with the principals to customize our services to match their needs and their missions. This can be quite challenging for our staff when services multiple schools with a variety of needs, requirements, and constraints.

There are approximately 100 NPSS staff members who provide services to the non-public schools. Of these 100, approximately 80 are itinerants who work in the field, often in relative isolation from each other and our organization. Typically they travel between two different schools within any one day. Total number of schools served per staff member can range from 3 to 10 schools in any one week.

My role in this organization is a new role and is still in the stages of being defined. My charge is to provide technology leadership and training for both our staff and eventually for the staff members of the individual non-public schools that we serve. I will be providing professional development functions, new programs development, integration support, and technology vision and leadership. I answer directly to the Director of Non-Public Schools. At the start of this action research project I have been in my current position for 2 months. While my level of participation started out as peripheral, it has rapidly changed to one of an active role. I will progress through the various three levels as I learn more about the culture and history of the division and as I execute this project. As I launch the project, I expect my

level of participation to move to the core group level and to include technology leadership. This action research project will assist me in developing my own practice within the organization while developing a network among my colleagues that will be invaluable in my professional career.

PROBLEM/SITUATION: The situation that I want to improve is collaboration and knowledge sharing among staff members resulting in the development of a common vision centered on our mission of literacy.

Currently, staff members are constrained by both time and location making it difficult for the itinerant staff to connect to, collaborate with, and share professional and personal knowledge with each other, supervisors, and the schools they serve throughout the year. Staff members feel disconnected from each other throughout the school year given that the entire group is centrally located only once per month for staff meetings where collaboration is limited. New itinerant staff members lack the ability to connect with more experienced members on a day-to-day basis to assist them in moving to the center of the professional community. Itinerant staff members operate individually from their own knowledge base rather than from a “collective” knowledge base. Working on committees or in small groups is location prohibitive. Staff members are disbursed throughout the county and collaboration requires everyone traveling to a central location after hours due to the fact that staff members are scheduled for instructional time during the day. While some members are willing to do this, there are members who would need to travel 45 minutes to 1 hour for this to be possible. This results in limited collaboration by some members and no collaboration by other members. The tremendous wealth of expertise and experience is difficult to tap by others because of the distributed nature of this division. The recurrent theme mentioned consistently by the itinerant staff is one of isolation and a feeling of disconnectedness. My action research will use technology to bridge to bring together the knowledge and experience of staff members through the cultivation of a community of practice, while at the same time providing situated, authentic technology mentoring using a vision/theme of Educational Technology Horizons.

RESEARCH QUESTION: My main research question is.....

Will the use of both face-to-face collaboration and virtual tools (Tapped In, eSchool Builder, AIM, Portals, etc) at my workplace result in the cultivation of a community of practice that promotes a sense of community, and a sharing of both practices and knowledge through providing flexible opportunities for staff members to meet and collaborate across time and distance?

Literature Review available [here](#).

MY ACTIONS (Cycle 1): The research question is....

If I invite staff members to participate in my quest to cultivate a community of practice by describing the potential value, will this develop a sense of interest and trust among them and encourage their participation?

The first actions that I have taken:

1. Invite participants to participate in a survey. The survey provides a means to uncover those interested in my quest to build a community of practice among staff members as a means to connect with each other, share common practices, solve everyday problems, expand our skills, provide innovative solutions to problems that we all face, empower ourselves to grow professionally, and share knowledge among our organization.
2. Conduct a survey to determine potential participants and key issues that are of concern to staff members.

3. Personally invite key members whom I have identified as necessary to provide legitimacy to the community.
4. Analyze the results of the survey.

ARTIFACTS COLLECTED: I will be SYSTEMATICALLY collecting the following....

Surveys, interviews, email communication, and field notes from face-to-face meetings.

EVALUATION: I have evaluated the outcomes of this action by....

Looking for patterns and seeking out new understandings from the data that I have collected:

- identify themes that emerged from the collected data
- code the interviews, surveys, and questionnaires
- ask key questions: who, what, where, when, why, and how?
- look at cause and effect relationships

Reflecting on the following questions throughout the cycle and at the end of the cycle will assist me in this analysis:

1. Is my research question still answerable and worth answering?
2. Is my data collection techniques catching the kind of data I want and filtering out the kind of data that I don't want?

The above steps will focus my attention on rethinking, reflecting, re-planning, understanding, and learning throughout this action research project. This reflection will be recorded in my blog:

January 16, 2005 – Cycle One Reflection available at:

<http://hale.pepperdine.edu/~kmconnag/arp/arpjournal.htm>

The **Technology Snapshot Survey** can be found at:

http://hale.pepperdine.edu/~kmconnag/arp/needs_assessment_final.pdf

A **Summary of the Technology Snapshot Survey** results can be found at:

<http://hale.pepperdine.edu/~kmconnag/arp/Techsnapshotsummary.pdf>

The purpose of the survey was to identify staff members who were open to the idea of participating in my action research, determine general information regarding attitudes about technology use in their practice, identify areas of concerns, determine general information about their technical skills, and provide an opportunity for staff to identify areas of technology they are interested in learning more about.

Survey results regarding interest in participating in this AR are:

68 staff members were surveyed:

#62 of surveys were completed

21 were not open to participating

41 were open to the idea of participating – 8 saying they would definitely participate.

Analysis of Survey Responses to four (4) questions specifically related to cultivation of a Community of Practice:

Given the definition and a brief overview of Community of Practice:

- All participants felt that a community of practice would be a beneficial addition to the division.
- 35 participants thought it was an interesting concept but wanted more information
- 29 participants saw it as a valuable asset
- 4 participants stated that they would not be interested in participating

These results indicate there is interest in cultivating a community of practice and in developing ways to collaborate to improve practice within the division. Many participants expressed the need for more information about the concept, but generally felt that it was a beneficial pursuit for our division.

Given an opportunity to participate in online professional development activities:

- 23 participants would enjoy participating in online professional development.
- 22 participants would rather complete activities face-to-face.
- 21 participants said they would be interested if they felt comfortable with the technology.
- 1 participant stated that it wouldn't matter whether activities were conducted online or face-to-face, they wouldn't participate.

Generally, many of the participants would be interested in online professional development activities. A number of participants would rather complete activities in face-to-face situations. However, twenty-one (21) said they would be interested in online participation if they felt more comfortable with the technology. Given these results, lack of technology skills and comfort with those skills appears to be a barrier for participation.

Given an opportunity to participate in an ONLINE community of practice for collaboration, planning, etc, and knowing that you would receive training and support in using the tools:

- 28 thought the idea of participating in a community of practice through online activities would be great.
- 15 thought that they would enjoy the chance to work online with colleagues
- 17 did not think they would find collaborating and meeting online to be productive
- 9 thought they might get more involved if it didn't involve traveling to the IU
- 1 didn't answer

Almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of those surveyed felt that online collaboration and communication would be interesting and enjoyable. Slightly more than $\frac{1}{4}$ did not feel the need to explore online collaboration. These results indicate that there is enough interest in developing a means to bring together the staff in ways that bridge the geographic distances.

Given an opportunity to participate in action research related to community of practices, online technology, and distributed workforces:

- 33 might be interested
- 16 would not be interested
- 11 see action research as a valuable source of professional growth, identity, and camaraderie
- 1 didn't answer

As noted in earlier item analysis, the members of the Non-Public School Services Division are generally interested in new methods of growing professionally. It must be considered that while 16 stated they would not be interested in participating in action research related to community of practices, 11 see action research in general as a valuable source of professional growth, identity, and camaraderie.

CYCLE TWO - The research question is....

If I provide additional information describing the project and the opportunities that collaboration can provide, will staff members who expressed a possible interest in participation agree to participate?

The second actions that I will be taking soon are....

1. Compose a personal invitation providing more detail about the project and inviting staff to participate.
2. Send invitations to interested staff members inviting them to participate.
3. Analyze the survey results of staff members who accept the invitation.
4. Arrange a common time and date through communication with participants.

ARTIFACTS COLLECTED: I will be SYSTEMATICALLY collecting the following...
Surveys, interviews, email communication, and field notes from face-to-face meetings.

EVALUATION: I will evaluate the outcomes of this action by....

Looking for patterns and seeking out new understandings from the data that I have collected:

- identify themes that emerged from the collected data
- code the interviews, surveys, and questionnaires
- ask key questions: who, what, where, when, why, and how?
- look at cause and effect relationships

Personal Invitation to Participate Results:

- 41 individual/personal invitations to participate were sent (with detailed info Related to the project)
 - 24 responded
 - 17 didn't respond (even with prompts a 2nd time)
 - 12 accepted the invitation to participate
 - 12 sent regrets

A copy of the Invitation to Participate is available at:

http://hale.pepperdine.edu/~kmconnag/arp/e-mail_invite.htm

The results of the invitation to participate indicated that ½ of the recipients of the invitation were interested in participating in the project.

- A summary of the Technology Snapshot results for the participants is available here: <http://hale.pepperdine.edu/~kmconnag/arp/TechsnapshotsummaryCoP.pdf>
- A common date and time was established through e-mail polling: January 21, 2005.

Reflecting on the following questions throughout the cycle and at the end of the cycle will assist me in this analysis:

1. Is my research question still answerable and worth answering?
2. Is my data collection techniques catching the kind of data I want and filtering out the kind of data that I don't want?

The above steps will focus my attention on rethinking, reflecting, re-planning, understanding, and learning throughout this action research project. A reflection on these questions is available in my blog dated January 20, 2005: <http://hale.pepperdine.edu/~kmconnag/arp/journal/01-19.htm>

PLAN (Cycle 3): While the outcomes and my reflections may change my plans dramatically, my current thoughts on my second cycle of action are....

CYCLE THREE – The research question is....

If I provide background materials and opportunities for dialogue and discussion, will this result in an interest/desire to explore new tools for learning and a willingness to share those experiences virtually?

The third actions that I will be taking soon are....

1. Develop a plan for our first meeting and arrange time and date based on availability of potential participants.
2. Arrange for “door prizes and snacks.”
3. Engage participants in discussion/dialogue using
 - “Opportunities” cards that describe a current learning technology and a description of how that technology will evolve in the future.
 - Discuss the current challenge for teachers – Time (an issued voice by many of the staff at NPSS).
 - How do you find the time to learn and experiment with new tools essential to learning and future work? Participants complete cards (for use next session) listing ideas.
 - Share (via cards for use next session) their current use of technology with students or how they use technology themselves in their jobs.
4. Relate that the opportunities cards are the “new realities” of the learning environment.
 - Interfaces – Aware Environments, Mind Models, Data Trading, Group Interfaces
 - Intro Tapped In (An Interface) - Tapped in Overview.
 - How could you use Tapped In - Complete the response cards (use for next time)
 - E-mail/interview/other communication with participants for feedback and follow up. Attitude toward collaborating virtually, any value they see, barriers they face, suggestions for improvement, new directions, etc.)

ARTIFACTS COLLECTED: I will be SYSTEMATICALLY collecting the following....

Anecdotal stories to measure the community’s effectiveness, participation records, threaded discussion messages, chat transcripts, photos, voice recordings, observations of interactions during face-to-face meetings, surveys, my own reflections and field notes, and the field notes of participants describing their “non-virtual” interactions.

EVALUATION: I will evaluate the outcomes of this action by....

Looking for patterns and seeking out new understandings from the data that I have collected:

- identify themes that emerged from the collected data
- code the interviews, surveys, and questionnaires
- ask key questions: who, what, where, when, why, and how
- look at cause and effect relationships

Reflecting on the following questions throughout the cycle and at the end of the cycle will assist me in this analysis:

1. Is my research question still answerable and worth answering?
2. Is my data collection techniques catching the kind of data I want and filtering out the kind of data that I don’t want?

The above steps will focus my attention on rethinking, reflecting, re-planning, understanding, and learning throughout this action research project. A reflection on these questions is available in my blog dated _____

PLAN (Cycle 4): While the outcomes and my reflections may change my plans dramatically, my current thoughts on my second cycle of action are....

CYCLE FOUR – The research question is....

If I provide participants with access to online tools for virtual collaboration, will this result in a willingness to participate in virtual dialogue/discussion?

The fourth actions that I will be taking soon are....

1. Review the “How could you use Tapped In” idea cards from last session.
2. Provide instruction for participants to get accounts, overview the “campus” feel, and navigation skills.
3. Me-101 link in office – Get to know me – send me an email telling me what they discovered about me from the links or post in the discussion thread what they learned about me.
4. Discussion thread practice – use the “cards” from the first session for participants to post, thereby focusing on the actual skill for this session.
5. Solicit other topics of interest that participants may like to discuss between our sessions.

ARTIFACTS COLLECTED: I will be SYSTEMATICALLY collecting the following....

Anecdotal stories to measure the community’s effectiveness, participation records, threaded discussion messages, chat transcripts, observations of interactions during face-to-face meetings, surveys, my own reflections and field notes, and the field notes of participants describing their “non-virtual” interactions.

EVALUATION: I will evaluate the outcomes of this action by....

Looking for patterns and seeking out new understandings from the data that I have collected:

- identify themes that emerged from the collected data
- code the interviews, surveys, and questionnaires
- ask key questions: who, what, where, when, why, and how?
- look at cause and effect relationships

Reflecting on the following questions throughout the cycle and at the end of the cycle will assist me in this analysis:

- Is my research question still answerable and worth answering?
- Is my data collection techniques catching the kind of data I want and filtering out the kind of data that I don’t want?

The above steps will focus my attention on rethinking, reflecting, re-planning, understanding, and learning throughout this action research project. A reflection on these questions is available in my blog dated _____

(Survey participants regarding their desire to collaborate virtually, the value they may see in the opportunity, barriers they are facing, how it could be made better, etc).

PLAN (Cycle 5): While the outcomes and my reflections may change my plans dramatically, my current thoughts on my second cycle of action are....

CYCLE FIVE – The research question is.... (DRAFT)

If I provide additional instruction for setting up an online office environment for participants, how will that affect their attitudes toward virtual collaboration and their use of the tool?

The fourth actions that I will be taking soon are.... (DRAFT)

1. Instruction in setting up virtual office
2. Idea generating regarding the types of things that can be placed in the office and what value that might hold for the group and the division
 - a. Sharing of documents to reduce workload
 - b. Sharing of knowledge regarding a specific strategy or practice area
 - c. Support for new teachers
 - d. Online library – place for retiring teachers to “leave their mark.”
3. Invite a colleague to bring to the next meeting and show them this environment and ask for ways it could be used.
4. How Could You Use Tapped In card completed – share next time

Future Ideas:

Make Your Mark – Peter Reynolds

Different groups for different purposes

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