University of Massachusetts at Boston
College of Advancing and Professional Studies
Graduate Program, Critical & Creative Thinking

CrCrTh 693: Action Research for Educational, Personal, & Professional Change
Spring 2019
Syllabus

Instructor: Jeremy Szteiter
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Phone: (617) 942-3580
Location: CCT Conference Room, Wheatley 4th floor, room W04-170
Course Dates: Thursdays, 7:00-9:45pm, February 7-May 9, 2019
Office hours: by arrangement, schedule here:
https://jeremyszteitercct.youcanbook.me/
Course Web site in Blackboard (start here for all materials):
https://umb.umassonline.net/
Academic Calendar: https://www.umb.edu/academics/caps/credit/spring/calendar

Course Format

Hybrid course with weekly meetings; students join on campus or online via web conference. Synchronous sessions will use Zoom:
https://umassboston.zoom.us/j/147099030. Blackboard is used as starting point for all course materials and documents.

Catalog Description

This course covers techniques for and critical thinking about the evaluation of changes in educational practices and policies in schools, organizations, and informal contexts. Topics include quantitative and qualitative methods for design and analysis, participatory design of practices and policies in a framework of action research, institutional learning, the wider reception or discounting of evaluations, and selected case studies, including those arising from semester-long student projects.

Notes about Preparation/Prerequisites Assumed for this Course

This course has no formal prerequisites. Through your previous courses, you should have developed the disposition of experimenting with new tools, even if not everyone became part of your toolkit as a learner, teacher/facilitator of others, and/or reflective practitioner. Through courses and other personal and professional experience you should have an interest in one or more Educational, Professional, or Personal issues that you might delve into with a view to promoting some needed change. Most importantly, you should be prepared to address the question: "If you have good ideas [about changes to make] how do you get others to adopt and/or adapt them?" (For CCT students, this course is best taken after Processes of Research and Engagement, but this sequence is not mandatory.)

Course Overview

The question above, "If you have good ideas [about changes to make] how do you get others to adopt and/or adapt them?", captures the central motivation for the course. This question can also be expressed as: "How do you build a constituency around your idea? This concern can lead you into evaluating how good the ideas actually are (with respect to some defined objectives) so you can demonstrate this to others. It can also lead you to work with others to develop the idea so it becomes theirs as well and thus

something they're invested in. Action Research, in the "Cycles & Epicycles" framework taught in this course, involves group facilitation, participatory planning, and reflective practice, as well as systematic evaluation. Students from a variety of programs should find this course a suitable vehicle to enhance your interests in educational, professional, or personal change.

Texts and Materials

Required:

- Taylor, P., J. Szteiter (2012) Taking Yourself Seriously: Processes of Research and Engagement. Arlington: The Pumping Station (as a printed paperback or ebook PDF from http://thepumpingstation.org/books/ or as paperback from other online booksellers). ISBN-13: 978-0984921607
- A good style/writing manual for formal paper writing. We won't refer to it directly in class, but this should be used to guide you in presenting academic work in writing. Appropriate items are recent editions of any of the following: a) Turabian, K. L., A Manual For Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations; b) The Chicago Manual of Style; c) Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association; d) MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. For course writing assignments, no single particular standard is required or favored, so each individual can choose a standard based on past experience as long as it is consistently applied. Free online style guides may also be used if they are published by high-quality sources that closely follow the standards of the publications above. One such site is the Purdue Online Writing Lab: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/
- Access to the UMass Boston online library resources. Students who would typically access library resources at another university may continue to use those but should be able to use your umb.edu account to log in to the UMass Boston library, since some of our course materials may require access anyway. It is expected that you will identify peer-reviewed journals during the course, and many can be accessed here.
- Online students will need a computer setup with a webcam and headset/microphone for our synchronous class meetings, which also require a reliable Internet connection for web video conferencing (wired connection is suggested).
- Students attending on campus should bring a laptop to class meetings in order to access online materials referenced as part of class activities.
- You also need a Professional Development (PD) Workbook: a workbook/journal to use for notes, reflections, and ideas - paper or electronic form. This will be discussed in more detail during the first class meeting. You will develop the format of this workbook throughout the semester to meet your own needs, but it should be (or evolve into) a well-organized system for capturing the many types information that need to be maintained during a research project and will include some regular reflective writings on course processes. Note that you will periodically have to submit this workbook in the form of digital files (even if that means scanning handwritten pages or creating a compliation of files into a PDF format from digital tools/sites).

Optional:

- Schmuck, R. (2006). Practical Action Research for Change. Arlington Heights, IL: Skylight. (printed paperback copies usually available from online sellers, used or new). ISBN-13: 978-1412938594
- Calhoun, E. F. (1994). How to Use Action Research in the Self-Renewing School. Alexandria, VA: ASCD. (may be of interest for those applying action research to school-wide change) Schuman, S., Ed. (2006). Creating a Culture of Collaboration: The International Association of Facilitators Handbook. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass. (may be of interest to those working on facilitation of groups)
- As a guide to writing: Daniel, D., C. Fauske, P. Galeno, and D. Mael. (2001). Take Charge of Your Writing: Discovering Writing Through Self-Assessment. Boston: Houghton Mifflin; we won't formally use this, but it may be of general interest to those wanting to give additional attention to improving their writing.
- Bibliographic software to help manage notes and references (e.g., Zotero, Mendeley); important for keeping track of your references, and makes it useful for creating nicely-formatted

bibliographies very quickly. You need not buy software; the UMass Boston library web site provides some resources for learning more about free versions of these tools: http://www.umb.edu/library/help

Learning Objectives

By the end of the semester, you will have:

1. experienced, learned, and practiced a set of tools and processes to promote participation and reflective practice (including your own participation);
2. learned to formulate informative comparisons as a basis for evaluations;
3. examined critically the evaluations of others (or the lack of the appropriate evaluations);
4. undertaken a project in an area of your particular concern in which you design (and, optionally, carry out) an Action Research process using the Cycles and Epicycles framework (and addressing the items listed below under Requirements).

Assessment and Requirements

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS AND PRESENTATIONS

In this course, you will define your own focus for the research project that you will carry through, over the semester. The project will culminate in the design/writing of a report (1900-2500 words) on Action Research Process related to an action or intervention in a specific classroom, workplace or personal teaching/learning practice, an educational policy, an educational institution, or a social policy. Your design should include all the aspects of the Action Research Cycles and Epicycles, including:

• how you will learn from evaluations of past changes or interventions like yours,
• how you would facilitate the reflective and/or collaborative process in which a constituency comes to join with you in shaping a change or intervention (or at least supporting your efforts), and
• how you would evaluate the outcome with a view to expanding further the constituency for adopting/adapting the change or intervention.

Full implementation of your action research is applauded, but not required. This means that the emphasis of the course is on planning well, which means planning out not only the steps involved in your research but also the actual implementation process, the way that you will evaluate the results, and the possibilities for how you might then make adjustments based on your evaluation as you look forward to ongoing work. If you actually carry out the design (or some of it) during the course term, you should report on what you have actually done and how you would proceed differently if you were to do it over/continue with what you have started. It is important that you do not let implementing your action/intervention eclipse attention to designing the other aspects of the Action Research. In general, instructor and peer review of written assignments and products of your research project will focus on how you've thought about the design and planning of what will happen later, rather than respond to what you've already implemented. Another important aspect, then, is to use the action research project to think about the longer term than is possible within a single semester. If you find that it seems quite straightforward to fully plan, implement, evaluate, and then revise your design within the few months of the course term, you may be asked to redefine your project to extend its reach, where you to seek to influence a wider audience or address a change on a more substantial scale.

The project is developed through a sequence of assignments:

• **W1**. Reflection on introductory action research modeled in early meetings

- **W2**. Initial description of project (based on strategic personal planning); *required*.
- **W3**. KAQF
- **W4**. Evaluation Clock
- **W5**. Initial work-in-progress presentation with notes on research and planning
- **W6**. Updated, full-length work-in-progress presentation (taking into account comments on initial version and notes); *required*.
- **W7**. Narrative Outline
- **W8**. Complete Draft Report, and revised Final Report (1800-2500 words); *required*.

DIALOGUE AROUND WRITTEN WORK

One of the processes used in the course involves Dialogue Around Written Work (see Taylor and Szteiter, pp 68-69). Initial drafts of Written Assignments should be submitted by the due date, and then will be returned with feedback, marked as either OK/RNR (=OK/ Reflection-revision-resubmission Not Requested) or with Revisions Requested (perhaps multiple times). Those with needed revisions should be resubmitted after considering the comments of the instructor and/or peers. The request for revisions may be made if some aspect of the assignment has either not been addressed, but more likely, such requests usually ask you to continue to develop your thinking around your project, deepening your understanding and giving your time to consider alternative approaches and perspectives.

This means that a draft of an assignment may actually fulfill the stated requirements and reflect high-quality thinking about your work and be "fine" in every respect but still leads to a request for revision. This request need not be interpreted as suggesting that some deficiency is present in your work, but as an opportunity to draw out additional insight as much as possible within the nature of your specific project. This process is what we mean by "dialogue around written work" – using written (and verbal) dialogue as a way of returning to the implicit assumptions that exist in any action research plan and reconsidering it in relation to wider possibilities. The combination of the various drafts of a written assignment, and written and verbal feedback from instructors/peers amount to a type of dialogue between writer and readers; the OK/RNR designation means that the dialogue has come to a rest around a particular assignment and that it is appropriate to shift your attention elsewhere. Request for Revision means that the dialogue continues, but it also means making thoughtful choices about how to address feedback. Instructor and peer comments should not be regarded as simply a checklist of things to change; instead, ask yourself, "Based on the feedback that I've received, what do I know now about the way that readers are understanding what I'm doing? How does this help me to clarify my ideas even further (that is, how can I develop my own thinking process around my work)? And then what might I do to revise so that I'm most effectively articulating my current thinking and direction -- so that I create the best chance to make sure that my reader's understanding of things lines up with my own?"

Initial drafts of each written assignment have a specified due date. Subsequent revisions do not have a formal due date, but you should aim to submit revisions within one week after receiving feedback to keep on a good pace. If initial drafts are turned in on time, feedback will be returned by the instructor within one week. Consequences are that the process works well if written assignments are turned in on time, even if not complete, and if revisions are resubmitted in a timely way (so that both the dialogue around written work can continue, and also so that leftover revisions are not building up too much toward the later part of the semester). This may different from your past course experiences where you aimed to refine something until it was "just right" and then submitted it, expecting then to be "done" with it. Here, the alternative is suggested – that it is helpful to submit work especially when it is incomplete, in a "half-baked" state, and/or your directions are not clear. This also means planning your time to anticipate that you'll revisit some assignments multiple times. You are much better off submitting substantial-but-incomplete drafts on time, rather than miss the due date and submit a highly-polished version very late.

PARTICIPATION ITEMS AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO COURSE PROCESS:

- **P1**. Building learning community through prepared participation and attendance at class meetings and in related activities (=13 items)
- **P2**. "Syllabus quiz" submitted by meeting 2 (=1 item)
- **P3**. Weekly buddy partner check-ins (as documented in your PD Workbook; see P5, below) (=6 items for 12 check-ins).
- **P4**. Written summaries of readings for certain meetings (=4 items)
- **P5**. Personal/Professional Development (PD) Workbook compiled throughout the semester (=8 items total), including:

    - Whole PD workbook submitted for review at mid-semester (=4 items [1 item for week 1-6 entries on reflections and possible application of tools to your project, 1 item for week 1-6 entries on buddy partner check-ins, 1 item for PD workbook worksheet on research organization, 1 item for an annotated clipping])
    - Whole PD workbook submitted for review at the end of the course (=4 items [1 item for week 7-13 entries on possible application of tools to your project, 1 item for week 7-13 entries on buddy partner check-ins, 1 item for course reflective process review/self-assessment, 1 item for an annotated clipping])

- **P6**. Minimum of two instructor conferences (in person, by phone, or by web conference) on your course progress -- one before meeting 5; the other before meeting 10 (=2 items)
- **P7**. Peer commentary on your buddy partner's work, once during each 4-week period and one more on another student's draft report (=4 items)
- **OPTIONAL P8**. Permission to share certain completed assignments as archived examples for future students in the course (=2 items maximum) (assignments must be approved by instructor and reach OK/RNR level).

Graded Requirements

General Rubric: students should aim for:

- All 8 written assignments (and presentations) initially submitted by the due date (**for spring 2019: this means end of day, 11:59pm ET on Thursdays**). Initial submissions don't need to be in final form but should show a good-faith effort to address the intentions of the assignment, rather than simply be a superficial outline.
- 7 written assignments that eventually reach the OK/RNR level (out of the total 8 possible). There are 3 written assignments that must be part of the 7 to pass the course (the initial description of the project, final work-in-progress presentation, and the final report).
- 30 participation items (out of a total 38 possible) fulfilled (no later than three days after the stated due date).
- If you reach or exceed these amounts, you get 80 points (which gives you an automatic B+) and the following Quality Rubric is used to add further points:

Quality Statement	0	1	2
1. Submitted your assignments paced more or less as in syllabus and in sequence, with timely revisions (revisions returned within 1 week after you get instructor feedback).			
2. Written assignment revisions are thorough and clearly show new thinking in response to comments and interactions.			
3. Project is innovative, such that you are making new connections beyond reporting on ground covered by others.			

Criteria			
4. Project was planned well and shows that you took considerable initiative to overcome obstacles that came up; includes ongoing attention to research organization as evidenced by your PD Workbook.			
5. Final Report clear and well structured, including demonstrating how your thinking has been influenced by both published literature and the direct experience of you and others; Final Report serves to guide others to build upon/adopt/adapt your findings.			
6. Final Report is professionally presented and organized, with appropriate and consistent academic standards for citations and formatting; few or no mechanical errors.			
7. Consistent and thoughtful weekly check-ins during buddy-group meetings outside of class (through interacting during live conversation by phone/web conference/in-person -- not simply by email exchanges).			
8. Conscientious peer commentary on other student's assignments; comments that question and stimulate thinking beyond superficial praise or suggestions.			
9. Self-assessment in relation to course goals that shows deep reflection on your development through the semester.			
10. Prepared, active, and engaged participation and support of building the class as a learning community, including completing readings and assignments ahead of class, speaking up during class discussions to share insights based on the readings and personal reflections, and providing your reasoning for your thinking. Also includes contributing to the group's collective understanding of how to be successful in a hybrid research course, where there is dependence upon technology resources and experimentation with tools, and where we help each other to recover from any technical difficulties, guide peers, and seek ways to make the course inclusive of participants across diverse needs and perspectives.			

0 = "not my strength in this particular course"
1 = "close to or reached the minimum requirement, but room for improvement"
2 = "accomplished well, have clearly gone beyond the minimum expectation"

If you don't fulfill enough of each of the requirements listed above to reach the automatic B+ level, your points = 3 for each writing assignment submitted by the initial due date + an additional 4.5 for each writing assignments OK/RNR + 1.5 for each participation item fulfilled, up to a maximum of 80 points. Overall points are converted to letter grades as follows:

The minimum grade for A is 95 points, for A- is 87.5, for B+ is 80, for B is 72.5; for B- is 65; for C+ is 57.5; and for C is 50 points.

Late Submission Policy

The course works by building from assignment to the next so late submissions detract significantly from the learning possible in class sessions. Instructor feedback is returned within one week for assignments submitted initially on-time and also for timely revisions.

Late assignments are accepted with the following stipulations:

- Written Assignments (W) are accepted late anytime throughout the course. For items submitted after the due date though, they affect the grading and evaluation rubrics as mentioned above,

and also, instructor feedback is not guaranteed within one week (this most potentially affects chances to revise assignments received late in the term);

- Participation Items (P) submitted more than three days after their due date will be regarded as Not Received for final grading purposes (if you miss these, better to let them go altogether and put your efforts toward upcoming work).
- Late submissions not counted toward the items above may be considered as a whole toward improving a borderline grade at the end of the course.

Implication: it is best to keep up with current assignments before returning to unstarted or unfinished items. Please refer to the Assignment Checklist to keep track of due dates and your progress rather than waiting to be reminded. If you feel at some point that you are starting to fall behind, you are encouraged to take the initiative to submit a plan to catch up and/or confer with the instructor to talk through your proposed steps.

Incomplete grades are given only in special circumstances and with documentation of need. The grading structure described here, which allows a fraction of assignments to be missed without penalty or explanation, accommodates the contingencies of your lives. Not requiring every assignment or item allows you to make choices based on your other commitments about which participation items and revisions to skip.

Brief Schedule of Sessions

Notes: in the event of campus closure due to bad weather, the class meeting will be held fully online; all meetings are 7:00-9:45pm ET on Thursdays.

Date	Topic
Week 1, Feb. 7	Course orientation, and Introduction to Action Research Cycles and Epicycles
Week 2, Feb. 14	Continue Introduction to Action Research Cycles and Epicycles
Week 3, Feb. 21	Strategic Personal Planning
Week 4, Feb. 28	Examining the Background and Evaluations of Previous Actions
Week 5, March 7	Formulating Informative Comparisons as a Basis for Evaluations
Week 6, March 14	Initial Work-in-Progress Presentations
March 21	*Spring Break, No class*
Week 7, March 28	Formulating Comparisons for Evaluation (continued), and Constituency-Building
Week 8, April 4	Reflection on Your Experience as Novice Action Researchers, Part 1
Week 9, April 11	Reflection on Your Experience as Novice Action Researchers, Part 2
Week 10, April 18	Updated Work-in-progress Presentations
Week 11, April 25	Influences of Political Context on Evaluation and Educational Research
Week 12, May 2	Generating Politics from Below in Relation to Educational and Action Research
Week 13, May 9	Taking Stock of the Course

Reflective Practice Portfolio

This only applies to students in the Critical and Creative Thinking MA Program: the Self-Assessment participation item, and/or selections from your Professional Development Workbook, are appropriate and recommended for inclusion in your MA program's Reflective Practice Portfolio. Other options might also be acceptable based on directions taken to fulfill your project.

Course Evaluation

At the end of the course, you will be asked to complete an anonymous, online course evaluation (http://bit.ly/CCTEval) as required by the Critical and Creative Thinking program. This evaluation is in addition to any other general evaluations requested of you by the university or College of Advancing and Professional Studies.

Accommodation Statement

Sections 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 offer guidelines for curriculum modifications and adaptations for students with documented disabilities. If applicable, students may obtain adaptation recommendations from the Ross Center (617-287-7430). The student must present these recommendations to each professor within a reasonable period, preferably by the end of the Drop/Add period.

Code of Conduct

Students are required to adhere to the Code of Student Conduct, including requirements for the Academic Honesty Policy, delineated in the University of Massachusetts Boston Graduate Studies Bulletin and relevant program student handbook(s). Policies may be found on the university web site at the following address:
https://www.umb.edu/life_on_campus/policies/academics

Note on Recording of Class Meetings

Please note that class meetings (or portions) may be recorded (audio and/or video) through the software used for web conferencing. Recorded class sessions are intended for the sole use of students currently enrolled in a course in order to view missed sessions or review segments for personal use, and these may only be viewed for the purpose of fulfilling course requirements. Links to recordings are only available under the password-protected site to registered students and are not listed or findable through public web sites. Recordings may not be shared with anyone not registered in the course, and they will be deleted at the end of the course term.

Instructor Background and Experience

Jeremy Szteiter is a graduate of Carnegie Mellon University (Cognitive Science) and University of Massachusetts Boston (Critical and Creative Thinking) and now serves as the Assistant Director of the graduate program in Critical and Creative Thinking at UMass Boston. His work has centered on teaching and program development, particularly in adult education settings within community-based human services organizations; this work has involved managing, developing, and teaching programs to lifelong learners and performing research around teaching practices, non-profit organizational development, and technology. Jeremy's work draws upon principles and practices of social change pedagogy, technology-enhanced collaboration, instructional design, and participatory theater.

Syllabus Version

January 2019; This syllabus is subject to change and updated versions may be distributed after the course begins, but the workload expectations will not be increased after the semester starts.

Course Bibliography

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