

Kent State University

Middle Childhood Education Department

Block III Field Experience: MCED 30000 Curriculum & Organization Course

*Action Research to Improve Achievement in Reforming Middle Level Schools*

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## *Action Research to Improve Achievement in Reforming Middle Level Schools*

### Project Narrative

The goals of the collaborative action research studies are to collect evidence to document how 1) *This We Believe* (NMSA, 2003) middle school standards are being implemented in three Ohio middle schools; 2) Kent State University teacher candidates are helping the learning process of middle school students during the *Curriculum and Organization* field course (*National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education Unit Standard #1* (NCATE, 2000); and 3) Collaboratively developed classroom lesson plans and assessments between Kent State University and middle schools that serve as field experience sites can help prepare middle students to meet Ohio Academic benchmarks.

Participants include Kent State University main campus and Kent Stark University regional campus teacher candidates, Kent State University main campus and Kent Stark University regional campus professors, mentor teachers and administrators from three Kent State University Block III field experience middle schools. The preliminary phase for these collaborative action research studies will begin February – May 2006.

### *Action Research Methodology*

Action research is the chosen method to investigate achievement because it provides a framework for collaborative problem posing and problem solving between university and public school teachers. Education researchers Arhar, Holly, and Kasten write,

Action research is a powerful method for documenting, developing, and evaluating the curriculum. Simultaneously, action research is a formidable process for evaluation and assessments as well as for professional growth (Holly, Arhar & Kasten, 2005, pp. x-xi).

#### Action Research Questions

- 1) How are three Ohio middle school field sites meeting *This We Believe* (NMSA, 2003) middle school standards?
- 2) How are Kent State University field candidates helping the learning process of middle school students during field experience (NCATE, 2000)?
- 3) How are collaboratively developed classroom lesson plans and assessments between Kent State University and middle school field sites helping to prepare middle students to meet Ohio Academic benchmarks?
- 4) What effects will the collaborative action research process between Kent State teacher candidates, mentor teachers, middle school students, principals, and professors have on professional growth and development, cultural transformation, critically reflective teaching practice, and curriculum and program development?

#### Action Research Data Collection

Kent State teacher candidates and mentor teachers will collaboratively collect qualitative and quantitative evidence for each of the *This We Believe* (NMSA, 2003) middle school standards. This evidence will be

collected, evaluated, and organized in a culminating electronic portfolio of the middle school field site. Portfolio artifacts may include: middle school student academic work, middle school student assessment scores, interviews, meeting minutes, case studies, written reflections, lesson plans, and surveys.

Action research offers both a product and process to enhance school achievement. The action research product, an electronic portfolio, will provide stakeholders with standards-based evidence of school strengths and weaknesses as a first step in developing action toward school improvement. The action research process offers the following ways to make the teaching and learning practice more effective for all participants (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005, p. 5):

- It is a powerful process and structure for professional growth, development, and lifelong learning
- The structure supports critically reflective practice that can become a natural part of teaching and learning for Kent State teacher candidates, mentor teachers, principals and professors
- Authentic, intentional, and conscious learning about education will be embedded in the daily teaching experience at middle school field sites
- Site-specific research will guide curriculum, staff, and program development in three Ohio middle schools

- Educational change will focus on what the school learning community values most, prioritizes and seeks to achieve

### *Action Research Presentations*

Collaborative action research teams, comprised of middle school mentor teachers, principals, Kent State University teacher candidates, and professors will present their experience of assessing, developing, and implementing strategies for raising academic performance using action research portfolios at faculty meetings, school board meetings and Ohio and/or National Middle School Association conferences.

### Benefits

- ❖ Produce an action research electronic portfolio of evidence of strengths and needed areas of growth for individual middle schools, that serve as field experience sites, striving to implement *This We Believe* (NMSA, 2003) standards
- ❖ Three participating public middle schools will develop continuous improvement plans and professional development seminars based upon action research identified needs
- ❖ Mentor teacher/ teacher candidate professional development is ongoing and embedded in authentic teaching activities
- ❖ Provide NCATE/NMSA evidence that Kent State University teacher candidates help to positively impact middle school students' learning during the Block III field experience
- ❖ Improve Ohio middle school students' achievement of Ohio benchmarks

- ❖ Implement Ohio Middle school field trip to expand students' educational experience as related to Ohio benchmarks
- ❖ Improve Kent State University field learning by implementing authentic action research assignments and assessments
- ❖ Tailor professional improvement seminars to meet the needs of each of the three participating middle schools
- ❖ Create and share a collaborative model between university and public middle school faculty for research-based school improvement at Ohio or National Middle School Association Conferences

#### Participants

- ❖ 45 Kent State University teacher candidates
- ❖ 25 Kent Stark University teacher candidates
- ❖ 70 public middle school mentor teachers
- ❖ 3 public middle school principals
- ❖ Ohio middle school students attending Harmon, Kimpton, and a middle school to be determined in Stark county
- ❖ Kent State University Middle Childhood Education Faculty
- ❖ Kent Stark University Middle Childhood Education Faculty

#### Evaluation

Kent State University faculty and school principals will evaluate the quality of the action research portfolios using a standardized portfolio rubric. Mentor teachers and Kent State University professors will provide midterm and

summative evaluations of the Kent State University teacher candidates' performance in the field. Kent State University candidates will complete critically reflective written evaluations stating what was learned about *High Quality Teaching* (National Middle School Association, 2004) through the action research process in May 2007.

Kent State University teacher candidates' influence on middle school student achievement of Ohio benchmarks will be documented through pre- and post-test data. Middle school students will be pre- and post- tested to discern how the field trip impacted students' learning of the identified Ohio benchmarks. Data on Kent State University teacher candidates' influence on middle school student learning will be collected and submitted as part of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education review of the Kent State University Middle Childhood Education program.

A summative written narrative and budget report on the Kent State University Action Research Achievement project will be submitted August 2007.

## References

- Davis, G.A. & Jackson, A.W. (2000). *Turning Points 2000: Educating adolescents in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Holly, M.L., Arhar, J. M. & Kasten, W. C. (2005). *Action research for teachers (Second Edition)*. Columbus, OH: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education. (2000). *NCATE 2000 Standards*. Retrieved December 12, 2004, from [http://www.ncate.org/standard/m\\_stds.htm](http://www.ncate.org/standard/m_stds.htm)
- National Middle School Association. (2004). *Research brief: Research in support of high quality middle level teachers*. Retrieved December 12, 2004, from <http://www.nmsa.org>
- National Middle School Association. (2004). *NMSA research summary #22: Professional development for teachers*. Westerville, OH: National Middle School Association.
- National Middle School Association (2003). *This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents*. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

**Sample: Middle School “This We Believe” Faculty Survey**

1. I believe developmentally responsive middle schools subdivide into smaller learning communities.

*Disagree*

*Neutral*

*Agree*

2. I believe developmentally middle schools provide an adult advocate for each student.

*Disagree*

*Neutral*

*Agree*

3. I believe developmentally middle schools are flexible in scheduling and staffing.

*Disagree*

*Neutral*

*Agree*

4. I believe developmentally middle schools provide varied teaching and learning approaches which promote collaborative involvement, hands-on experiences and authentic assessments.

*Disagree*

*Neutral*

*Agree*

5. I believe developmentally middle schools provide a challenging curriculum which is interdisciplinary and exploratory in nature.

*Disagree*

*Neutral*

*Agree*

6. I believe developmentally middle schools offer co-curricular activities beyond the school day.

*Disagree*

*Neutral*

*Agree*

7. I believe developmentally middle schools intentionally partner with families and community members.

*Disagree*

*Neutral*

*Agree*

8. I believe developmentally middle schools initiate purposeful and planned transition activities as our students move from elementary level to middle level and from the middle level to the high school.

*Disagree*

*Neutral*

*Agree*

9. I believe developmentally middle schools provide safe, inviting, caring environment.

*Disagree*

*Neutral*

*Agree*

10. I believe developmentally middle schools provide abundant opportunities for students to achieve and maintain healthy minds and bodies.

*Disagree*

*Neutral*

*Agree*

11. I believe developmentally middle schools employ staff members who are dedicated to teaching young adolescents, provide ongoing staff development on best practices for young adolescents, and create opportunities for collaboration to enhance programming.

*Disagree*

*Neutral*

*Agree*

12. I believe developmentally middle schools make decisions concerning student learning and school operations collaboratively with students, teachers, administrators and families, and community

*Disagree*

*Neutral*

*Agree*

## Sample: Kent State University Teacher Candidate Assignments

### NMSA Belief Portfolio Journal Entries

#### A. *Written journal components:*

- A. Heading: State name and number of NMSA Belief Statement  
 KSU Teacher Candidate Name:  
 Date:
- B. NMSA Belief Statements: This We Believe Theory to Practice
1. Collect as much evidence as possible on how the school is practicing the belief statement.
  2. Reflect on the “This We Believe” statements that are outlined for each class.
- How is the school practicing this belief?
  - What other ways might you suggest for the school to carry-out this belief statement?
  - How could you practice this belief in your classroom?
  - Cite one example from class (i.e. readings, activities, speakers, etc.) that support the belief.

### NMSA This We Believe Statements: Journal Headings

1. I believe developmentally responsive middle schools subdivide into smaller learning communities.
2. I believe developmentally middle schools provide an adult advocate for each student.
3. I believe developmentally middle schools are flexible in scheduling and staffing.
4. I believe developmentally middle schools provide varied teaching and learning approaches which promote collaborative involvement, hands-on experiences and authentic assessments.
5. I believe developmentally middle schools provide a challenging curriculum which is interdisciplinary and exploratory in nature.
6. I believe developmentally middle schools offer co-curricular activities beyond the school day.
7. I believe developmentally middle schools intentionally partner with families and community members.
8. I believe developmentally middle schools initiate purposeful and planned transition activities as our students move from elementary level to middle level and from the middle level to the high school.
9. I believe developmentally middle schools provide safe, inviting, caring environment.
10. I believe developmentally middle schools provide abundant opportunities for students to achieve and maintain healthy minds and bodies.
11. I believe developmentally middle schools employ staff members who are dedicated to teaching young adolescents, provide ongoing staff development on

best practices for young adolescents, and create opportunities for collaboration to enhance programming.

12. I believe developmentally middle schools make decisions concerning student learning and school operations collaboratively with students, teachers, administrators and families, and community

### **Tutor an Individual Student and Develop a Case Study**

It is important that you pre-test your student's content knowledge of the Ohio grade level benchmark before beginning the tutoring sessions. Following the tutoring sessions, post-test your student's content knowledge. Include the pre-test and post-test data as part of your reflective essay. Write a reflective essay.

Use the following headings to organize this case study essay:

- 1) The purpose of tutoring this student. What will the student be able to do following tutoring sessions? (2 pts)
- 2) The middle level student's developmental needs (intellectual, physical, emotional/psychological, social, moral/ethical) (2 pts)
- 3) Learning style and corresponding methods used in tutoring (2 pts)
- 4) Demographics (culture/gender/SES/language differences) (2 pts)
- 5) Tutoring learning environment (2pts)
- 6) Create a bar graph chart using pre-test and post-test student content knowledge data. (6pts)
- 7) Summarize and synthesize what you learned through tutoring this individual student (4pts)

### **Assessment**

Continue to build your knowledge of assessment. K & K describes three avenues for assessing student learning (p. 353): 1) assess what the student says; 2) assess what the student does; 3) assess what the student writes. Select any avenue that is appropriate for your field experience placement. Create a developmentally appropriate middle school student assessment for an Ohio grade level benchmark, or a related objective, that you will teach in April. Be sure to identify the Ohio benchmark and specific learning objectives in your lesson plan. Clearly match your assessment to those objectives. Attach:

- Your complete Praxis III lesson plan (reflections are not required) (3)
- The assessment (3)
- 3 samples of graded student work (2)
- One page reflection indicating what you learned through your assessment about how well students were able to meet your objectives and any changes you might make in the future (2)

