



Anglia Ruskin
University

Cambridge & Chelmsford

Learning Development Services

**SEDA – Professional Development Framework
SEDA AWARD: Action Research**

**Action Research into Professional Practice (ARPP)
Professional Qualification Course Guide**

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Anglia Learning and Teaching
Inspiring Academic Excellence

Action Research into Professional Practice

Professional Qualification Course Guide

Contents	Page
Welcome and Introduction	3
• What does action research entail?	3
• The Action Research into Professional Practice (ARPP) course	4
• Aims	4
• Audience	4
• Core Development Outcomes	4
• Specialist Outcomes	5
• Values	5
The Practicalities	5
• How will I demonstrate the outcomes and values?	5
• What is the portfolio?	6
• What materials should I include?	6
• What about collaborative activities?	8
• How many hours a week do I need?	8
• How will I be supported?	8
• What resources does the course provide?	8
Course Calendar	9
References	9
Appendices	10
Appendix 1: Learning Agreement	
Appendix 2: A note about examining and reflecting on your practice	
Appendix 3: Development plan template	

Welcome and Introduction

Welcome to Anglia Learning and Teaching's Action Research into Professional Practice course (ARPP). This course is designed to meet the standards of the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) (<http://www.seda.ac.uk/>) Professional Development Framework (PDF). SEDA is a long established national body whose awards are widely recognised and valued.

The ARPP course meets the aims, core development and specialist outcomes for the "Action Research" named award.

▪ **What does action research entail?**

Lewin (1946, 1948) is generally credited with coining the term Action Research during his search for a methodology which would support social change. As he said, 'Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice' (Lewin 1946, 1948). Since then, Action Research has developed from its initial use within social welfare fields, to a methodology with application across many fields where the purpose of the activity is to effect **change**. In the context of ARPP this means change in (for example) educational processes, procedures, learning and teaching practice; or professional practice which can be directly effected by the practitioner-researcher(s).

Lewin identifies a series of steps for the process of Action Research which include:

- identifying the idea for change
- fact finding
- planning
- taking action
- evaluating
- amending planning, and
- taking the next action (Lewin 1946, 1948).

All research has the aim of advancing knowledge and Action Research aims to advance knowledge through:

- promoting individual and collective knowledge from the construction of meaning;
- making tacit knowledge explicit; and
- improving understandings (as in case studies).

The validity of an Action Research methodology is as dependent as any other on the rigor with which the research is undertaken. The problem to be addressed (the idea for change) must be carefully defined; data must be gathered systematically and in full recognition of the pros and cons of various methods of data collection; the action(s) to be taken must be clearly informed by the empirical data and observations and existing and current knowledge in the field (or parallel field if necessary); and the reader must be able to see that interpretations, evaluations and conclusions are the natural provenance of the research process.

To sum up, an Action Research methodology is adopted by the practitioner-researcher who wishes to be directly involved in the development of practice in their field, through rigorous and valid research. Action research is '... a process that helps you,

a practitioner, to develop a deeper understanding about what you are doing as an insider researcher.' (McNiff 2007, p13).

A good source of readable work on the use of Practitioner Enquiry and Action Research in HE is to be found in publications from the Open University's Centre for Outcomes Based Education (COBE).

This can be accessed at:

<http://www.open.ac.uk/cobe/docs/AR-Guide-final.pdf>

The Action Research into Professional Practice (ARPP) course

▪ Aims

The ARPP course aims to develop skills, knowledge and experience in the theory and practice of action research to promote a culture of research informed teaching and learning practice to enhance our students' experience.

Within the SEDA-PDF there are a number of named awards. The ARPP course has been designed to meet the requirements of the SEDA-PDF Award 'Action Research'.

The SEDA-PDF named award 'Action Research' enables an individual to select, investigate and enhance a chosen area or aspect of work through the completion of an action research cycle. The action research cycle will drive the investigation to completion. Any associated ethical issues will need to be identified and appropriate institutional approval gained for completion.

The ARPP course will support each individual participants' research, whilst providing them with an opportunity to become a member of a learning community for development and support. Participants will be encouraged to engage with this community to seek peer reflection and feedback, and to contribute to the development of themselves and others.

▪ Audience

The Award is applicable to a wide range of academic and academic related staff working in higher education. Those who have any role which supports or enables learning and/or discipline based educational research will complete a small scale investigation into a selected topic of professional practice.

The course has been developed primarily to support our learning and teaching fellowship holders. However it is therefore of interest and value to all those who may support or facilitate learning whether they are academic teachers, librarians and researchers, or work in other roles which directly support student learning or staff training.

▪ Core Development Outcomes (CDO)

Those successfully undertaking and completing any SEDA-PDF recognised programme will be able to:

CDO1 Identify their own professional development goals, directions or priorities

CDO2 Plan for their initial and / or continuing professional development

CDO3 Undertake appropriate development activities

CDO4 Review their development and their practice, and the relations between them

▪ **Specialist Outcomes (SO)**

Additionally, within their organisational and strategic contexts, those completing the 'Action Research' Award will be able to:

- SO1 Select an area of practice for development
- SO2 Provide a rationale for the choice
- SO3 Complete a cycle of action research in the selected area
- SO4 Evaluate the (potential) impact of the action research cycle
- SO5 Reflect upon the benefits of engaging with others in this work.

▪ **Values (V)**

Further, those successfully undertaking and completing any SEDA-PDF recognised programme will have shown how their work is informed by the SEDA-PDF Values:

- V1 An understanding of how people learn
- V2 Scholarship, professionalism and ethical practice
- V3 Working in and developing learning communities
- V4 Working effectively with diversity and promoting inclusivity
- V5 Continuing reflection on their professional practice
- V6 Developing people and processes.

Further guidance on the SEDA-PDF Values can be found at <http://www.seda.ac.uk/pdf/11%20SEDA%20PDF-Values.htm>

The Practicalities

▪ **How will I demonstrate the outcomes and values?**

The ARPP course anticipates that you will be involved in approximately 180 hours of directed and self-directed studies and activities.

To gain the Award candidates design, complete and disseminate an action research project over a period of one calendar year. Award candidates must provide a portfolio which shows that they have:

- Developed, and agreed with the course supervisor(s), an action research proposal
- Completed a cycle of action research
- Disseminated their work through a contribution to our annual Learning and Teaching Conference and Anglia Learning and Teaching's research journal – Networks, or an equivalent relevant conference and professional journal.

In addition, to ensure that you have satisfied the Core Development and Specialist Outcomes for this SEDA Award and the underpinning SEDA Values you will have to:

- Define your learning goals for the programme of research you have undertaken
- Participate in the introductory face to face session
- Participate in peer review
- Reflect on your progress during the action research cycle
- Evaluate your achievement of your learning goals and course outcomes, and develop an action plan for your future development.

- **What is the portfolio?**

The term Portfolio is used in this context for a collection of materials that supports and evidences the learning undertaken during this course. The materials must demonstrate the Core Development and Specialist Outcomes, and your commitment to the SEDA Values.

- **What materials should I include?**

In the main, the contents of the portfolio are those which naturally arise from participation in a research process and you should remember that the sole reason for placing an item in the portfolio is because it helps evidence your achievement of the Outcomes and Values. Less means more!

Here is how the items required for your portfolio will evidence the SEDA outcomes:

Portfolio contents	CDO1	CDO2	CDO3	CDO4	SO1	SO2	SO3	SO4	SO5
A statement of your learning goals	X				X				
A copy of your learning agreement	X	X	X						
A research proposal which identifies and justifies an area of practice for development through action research, provides a plan of activity and (where applicable) an estimation of costs (1500 words)	X	X	X		X	X			
A declaration regarding the ethical implications of your research and, where necessary, a copy of the ethical approval for your research			X			X		X	
An interim report, which reflects on the progress of your research, any changes to your research design, and your progress towards your learning goals (1000 words)			X	X			X		X
A final report which reflects on the outcomes of your research, and the (potential) impact of the action research cycle on your future practice and that of others in your field, and the benefits of engaging with others in this work (2000 words)			X	X			X	X	X
An action plan for your ongoing professional development	X	X							X

And how the SEDA Values inform your work:

Portfolio contents	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6
A scholarly and reflective commentary which weaves together the contents of your portfolio and identifies how the SEDA Values inform your work (1000 words)	X	X	X	X	X	X

We have selected these items and mapped them against the Core Development and Specialist Outcomes for you. It may be however, that you wish to include additional materials such as academic papers, presentation materials and research outputs. If necessary, alternative forms of evidence may be negotiated with your course supervisor.

▪ **What about collaborative activities?**

Much of our work as teachers and supporters of learning is necessarily undertaken with other people. Indeed, the third SEDA Value indicates that staff and educational development is about working in learning communities, and the 5th specialist outcome for this Award, specifically requires you to reflect upon the benefits of engaging with others in your work. However, when selecting and presenting your evidence for your portfolio, it is important that you make clear the nature and extent of your own role in such collaboration.

▪ **How many hours a week do I need?**

As you have a period of a year in which to complete your research, you will find that you will experience intensive activity for some of the time, and much less at others. You should anticipate needing to allocate around 180 hours of scholarly activity to your research, but this is dependent upon your research methodology, and must be agreed with your course supervisor in your learning agreement.

▪ **How will I be supported?**

You will be supported by an allocated course supervisor and an initial workshop which introduces you to action research, supports you in developing your research proposal and advises you on the procedures for gaining ethical approval for your research.

However early on, we will encourage you to see yourself as being part of a learning community. Supported by the course supervisor(s), you and other participants with similar or quite different professional and personal backgrounds and areas of research will form a learning community in which you debate, share and consult each other's thoughts, ideas and experiences. Participation in peer review is therefore an essential component of successful completion.

▪ **What resources does the course provide?**

The course is delivered almost entirely through independent learning, supported by an allocated course supervisor. The learning community that you will build with other participants is an essential resource to allow you to give and receive feedback from your peers. The resource base includes:

- Yourself
- Other participants
- The course supervisors
- The face-to-face activities in week 1
- Your shared reflections and experiences
- The course guide

There are no core reading texts as such but you may find the following texts useful:

Fox M, Martin P & Green G (2007), *Doing Practitioner Research*, London, Sage
Stringer ET (2007), *Action Research* [3rd Edition], London, Sage

McNiff J, Lomax P and Whitehead J (2003), *You and Your Action Research Project* [2nd Edition], London, RoutledgeFalmer

each of which is available in Anglia Ruskin's university library.

Course calendar

End April:	Call for Research Proposals
Early May:	Initial workshop
End May:	Final Submission of Proposals
Mid July:	Notification of acceptance on the course
Beg September:	Allocation of course supervisor and Peer Review Buddy(ies)
End February:	Submission of Interim Report and Peer Review
End June:	Submission of Final Report and Peer Review
TBA:	Presentation at Learning and Teaching Conference

References

Lewin K (1946) Action research and minority problems. *Journal of Social Issues*. 2: 34- 46.

Lewin, K. (1948). *Action research and minority problems in Resolving social conflicts* (Ed. GW Lewin). New York: Harper & Row.

McNiff J, Lomax P and Whitehead J (2003), *You and Your Action Research Project* [2nd Edition], London, RoutledgeFalmer

Appendices

Appendix 1: Learning Agreement

Rationale

Teachers and learners alike need to be aware of what is expected of them in any programme of study. This is particularly important for programmes where:

- there is a significant element of self-directed or open learning
- the success of the programme depends on the active participation of learners
- the use of technology is a potential source of additional challenge
- the learning community contains a wide range of experiences and expertise.

This course fulfils most of these conditions and therefore a learning agreement is likely to be helpful.

Expectation of Participants

1. You are expected to maintain regular (ie once a month) contact with your course supervisor.
2. You are encouraged from the beginning of the course to adopt sound time management strategies and are strongly advised to devise a research plan which will schedule allotted time periods of sufficient duration to adequately accommodate the conclusion of your research.

NB: *We would recommend an expectation of an average of around 180 hours to complete your research activities.*

3. You are expected to fully engage the process of Peer Review by:
 - ensuring your report has been completed beforehand
 - submitting your Interim and Final Reports on time
 - contributing a timely response to your allocated peer review buddy(ies).

NB. All contributions should be of a high quality, designed to encourage discussion, relevant to the particular group task and in keeping with the philosophy of the course's intended learning outcomes

You are expected to contact their course supervisor as soon as possible if you are unable to participate in the peer review process, and should also inform you peer review buddy(ies) accordingly.

NB. *All peer reviews will be made in a positive and constructive manner in keeping with the shared values and beliefs of the community.*

Expectations of Course Supervisors

Your course supervisor will make contact with you during early September to arrange an initial meeting.

Your course supervisor will aim to respond to email messages from you within 2 working days.

Course supervisors will, where appropriate, assist participants in structuring their research activities and set timeframes for their completion to help participants manage their time effectively.

Agreement declarations

Participant:

I

agree to adhere to the terms of the course Learning Agreement as outlined in the ARPP course.

Date:

Signed:

Course supervisor:

I

agree to adhere to the terms of the course Learning Agreement as outlined in the ARPP course.

Date:

Signed:

Appendix 2: A note about examining and reflecting on your practice

A key feature of the course is the emphasis that is placed upon you thinking about the implications of your research for ***your practice***. This involves you examining and reflecting upon what you do against the **SEDA values**:

- 1 An understanding of how people learn
- 2 Scholarship, professionalism and ethical practice
- 3 Working in and developing learning communities
- 4 Working effectively with diversity and promoting inclusivity
- 5 Continuing reflection on their professional practice
- 6 Developing people and processes

- **SEDA Values**

Many of us subscribe to values that implicitly inform our professional practice. However, since its inception, SEDA has been an explicitly values-driven organisation, and in the course of its history these values have been discussed and reviewed. As well as being 'aspirational' they are intended to be realistic and achievable in informing our professional practice.

In current PDF-recognised programmes, participants are required to illustrate how their work is informed by the SEDA Values. In order to do this for the Action Research Award, at the conclusion of the ARPP course you are required to weave together the contents of your portfolio with a 1000-word reflection on how the SEDA Values inform your professional practice. Whilst SEDA Values are at the conclusion of the course, it is important not to wait until then before thinking about how they inform your approach to researching your practice.

- **What Does SEDA Mean by Underpinning Values?**

The SEDA underpinning Values are not an attempt to prescribe what we think or believe or feel. They are rather about our actions as teacher, facilitator and supporter of learning, and developer. They are sometimes about *what* we do; sometimes about *why* and *how* we do it; sometimes about what our actions are intended to achieve. They do not claim to be an exhaustive list of the values which should underpin our practice. However, these Values, and any that we individually may add, live in our actions.

- **What would an examination of your practice involve?**

Examining your practice involves investigating it. ARPP is particularly relevant here and the process of selecting an aspect of your teaching and learning to research, carrying out the research and reflecting on the outcomes, will provide much of the evidence you require. However you must explicitly identify how you have addressed the SEDA Values in your research in a way which illustrates the application of critical thinking skills.

Stella Cottrell gives a good overview of what is involved in a critical thinking process:

"Critical thinking is a complex process of deliberation which involves a wide range of skills and attitudes. It includes:

- *identifying other people's positions, arguments and conclusions;*

- *evaluating the evidence* for alternative points of view;
- *weighing up opposing arguments* and evidence fairly;
- *being able to read between the lines*, seeing behind surfaces, and identifying false or unfair assumptions;
- *recognising techniques* used to make certain positions more appealing than others, such as false logic and persuasive devices;
- *reflecting on issues* in a structured way, bringing logic and insights to bear;
- *drawing conclusions* about whether arguments are valid and justifiable, based on good evidence and sensible assumptions;
- *presenting a point of view* in a structured, clear, well reasoned way that convinces others. ¹ (Cottrell, (2005), p2)

When you write a reflective commentary you seek to make sense of your experience and to learn from it in an explicit and, hopefully, scholarly way. Perhaps the most powerful tool for supporting our development is a continuing scholarly, deep, analytic reflection on our practice. In order to think about and write a reflective commentary, it can be helpful to ask yourself a series of questions, for example:

Before a development activity / process:

What am I trying to achieve?
How will I know how successful I have been?
During the activity/process:
How is it going?
What, if any, changes should I make now?

After the activity / process:

How did it go?
How far did it achieve what I intended it to achieve?
How do I know this?
Why did what I did have the effects that it did?
What unintended things happened?
What could or should I do differently next time?

These last 6 questions 'after the activity / process' can be repeated after a series of events or activities, and then, after going round these cycles a few times, we can ask further questions about the value of the questions themselves and how we can become better at reflecting. Reflecting is essential but not sufficient. We also need action, a testing and implementation of what we have learned in our practice, so that we can learn and improve from the continued interaction between action and reflection, each informing the other. For this purpose you will be asked to:

- summarise your reflections on this course,
- link your initial proposed learning goals to your achieved learning goals and
- create a development plan defining how you intend to progress the experiences, skills and knowledge from this course in your professional practice.

¹ Cottrell, St., (2005) Critical Thinking Skills. Developing Effective Analysis and Argument. Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Appendix 3: Development plan template

Use the template below to create your development plan. Objectives should be SMART:

- Specific and Stretching
- Measurable
- Achievable and agreed
- Relevant and realistic
- Timed and trackable

Target/Goal	Measurable Outcome(s)	Resources required	Action required by whom	Target date and priority	Action monitored by	<i>Date action completed</i>
	•					
	•					
	•					
	•					
	•					
	•					