

## **WHITWORTH MIT PROGRAM ACTION RESEARCH**

### **MIT Program Goal**

The goal of the MIT program is to assist future teachers in developing their teaching visions as they practice becoming reflective teacher-scholars. In light of this goal, MIT candidates, in cooperation with their mentor teachers, strive to study their own practice of teaching, to engage in a process of inquiry which will help them learn more about their work, ask better questions about what works best, and change on the basis of systematic study. The MIT candidate's purposeful study of their teaching practice is consistent with what is currently termed "teacher-as-researcher" or "action research".

### **What is Action Research?**

The term *action research* captures the notion of disciplined inquiry (thus, "research") in the context of focused efforts to improve the quality of teaching and ultimately the impact on student learning (thus, "action") (Burnaford, Fischer, & Hobson, 1996). Calhoun, author of *How to use action research in the self-renewing school* (1994), states, "School is where renewal happens, and the process begins with ourselves. Our professional role is not to "fix society." We cannot change the home environment of many of our children; nor can we immediately improve the socioeconomic status of the families who depend on us to provide an education for their children. What we can do immediately is to make better choices about how we spend student and adult time and energy in our school." MIT candidates attempt to better understand their teaching by studying the impact of their choices in instruction and curriculum on student understanding.

### **Conducting Action Research in the MIT Program**

The MIT's study of their practice is not research in the traditional sense of trying to prove a hypothesis. To the contrary, MIT action research studies seldom *prove* anything, and the results may not be generalizable to other classroom situations. The value of action research lies in gathering information in order to answer a problem or question in the classroom. Accordingly, the MIT action research study is naturalistic rather than experimental. There is no attempt to randomize subjects, to have control and experimental groups, or to control all the variables. What the MIT does is to intervene in some way (i.e., they have an idea and collect data to see if the idea makes a difference in their students' learning). Much of the data gathered is qualitative, including student interviews, observations, and examples of student work.

MIT candidates design and conduct a study of the impact of their teaching on the learning of their students. Candidates select a problem or question they would like to study in their K-12 classroom, focused on the Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs). They design a study during fall semester and write a research proposal that is reviewed by Whitworth College's Institutional Review Board. Candidates conduct the study during their spring semester student teaching practicum. Data is analyzed in May term, and the final Action Research Project is presented to peers, mentor teachers, and administrators at the annual MIT Research and Development Conference in July. The intentional reflection on their own teaching practice, and the impact on student learning aligns with the vision of the MIT Program in developing "Reflective Teacher Scholars".

### **Determining an Action Research Topic**

To determine a topic of study for action research, mentors, MIT candidates, administrators, and other interested classroom participants should examine what is currently occurring in the classroom, and define areas of interest for study. MITs typically investigate incorporating classroom instructional strategies, or utilizing innovative curriculum, always with a clear vision towards improving student learning. Conversations between mentors and MITs, and observations made by MIT candidates in the classroom typically provide the basis for identifying an area of mutual interest and concern for both mentor and MIT.

### **Steps in Action Research**

1. Identify an area of interest;
2. Design a method to collect data;
3. Determine the sample of students to study;
4. Develop data collection instruments (surveys, interview guides, etc.);
5. Collect data over an extended period of time in the classroom;
6. Analyze the data;
7. Interpret and apply the findings;
8. Report the findings to others to increase the collective knowledge base.

### **The Role of Mentors in Action Research**

Mentors and administrators are a crucial component in the process of the MIT action research project. Mentors can assist the MIT in determining a research topic that is both interesting and useful to the mentor and MIT. The design of the MIT action research study is intentionally planned to not interfere with normal classroom routine as it is carried out during the spring semester (Feb. - May). MIT candidates meet bi-weekly during the fall with a research instructor and periodically with their research supervisor to plan their action research study. During the study, the mentor can assist MIT students in gathering classroom data, when appropriate, such as making student observations while the MIT candidate is teaching. The final report of the action research project is presented at the Annual MIT Research and Development Conference, held during July at Whitworth. Mentors and administrators are invited to attend this conference to hear the results of action research studies conducted within their classrooms and districts. The sharing of results of a purposeful study of one's teaching practice provides a forum for continued school improvement.

### MIT Action Research Project Timeline

Month	MIT Responsibilities	Mentor Recommendations
September	Observation in the classroom, initial identification of an action research area of interest	Discuss potential research areas with MIT
October	Determine action research topic, begin review of related research, meet with research supervisor	Assist with determining research topic, meet with MIT and research supervisor
November	Design study to complete during student teaching, meet with MIT research supervisor and mentor, submit data gathering instruments and consent form to Whitworth IRB	Discuss with MIT and research supervisor potential data gathering instruments, research design, and related literature implications
December	Complete action research proposal, share research design with mentor	Discuss final plans for action research study with MIT
February - May 15	Begin student teaching, follow research proposal, gather data, meet periodically with research supervisor	Support MIT during student teaching, assist where agreed upon in data collection such as observation, visit with research supervisor
May 15 - June	Analyze collected data, meet for EDM 533C at Whitworth on Tue. and Thur.	
June - July	Complete writing of action research study, share findings with mentor, present findings at MIT Research and Development Conference	Discuss research findings with MIT, attend, if possible, the MIT Research and Development Conference