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Discussion Post – Clarifying the Problem (EDLD 5315)

Engaging with Chapters 4–6 of *Action Research: Improving Schools and Empowering Educators* and viewing Action Research Videos 3.1 and 4.1 presented by Dr. Craig A. Mertler helped me clarify not only what my action research topic is, but why it matters and how all components of the research design must align. The use of the 5 Why Process and the Action Research Design Development template provided a clear structure that guided my thinking and helped me move from a broad concern to a focused and researchable problem of practice (Mertler, 2020).

The work I completed in my innovation planning course (EDLD 5305) played a critical role in helping me select my action research topic. Through the implementation of Tech Time: My Time in Kindergarten, I began noticing patterns related to student independence and engagement during daily technology center rotations. While the innovation supported learning in meaningful ways, it also revealed inconsistencies, particularly in how students navigated digital tools independently and how home access impacted continuity. These observations naturally led me toward an action research focus grounded in my classroom context.

Using the 5 Why Process allowed me to identify the root cause of the problem rather than addressing surface-level symptoms. Through this process, I recognized that inconsistent student independence during technology centers is closely connected to limited and uneven access to digital tools and support at home, especially within a Title I context. This clarification helped me avoid framing the problem as a student or family deficit and instead focus on instructional routines and structures that can be improved within the classroom.

Based on this reflection, the topic of my action research centers on student independence and engagement during structured technology center rotations in kindergarten mathematics instruction. The purpose of my study is to examine how structured digital routines support consistent student engagement and independence during small-group instruction. My fundamental research question is:

How do structured digital routines during daily technology center rotations impact kindergarten students' independence during mathematics small-group instruction?

Chapters 4–6 and Dr. Mertler's explanations in Videos 3.1 and 4.1 emphasized the importance of developing a well-defined research question before selecting data sources or research methods. Without a clearly developed research question, educators risk collecting data that does not align with the purpose of the study, leading to confusion or misinterpretation. Looking ahead to data collection and analysis, as outlined in Table 4.2, reinforced the need for alignment across all elements of the research plan (Mertler, 2020).

Using Table 4.1 as a guide, my research question led me toward a mixed-methods action research design. Student independence involves observable behaviors that can be measured quantitatively, as well as instructional insights best captured through qualitative reflection. The most appropriate data to collect includes both quantitative and qualitative forms. Specifically, I plan to collect time-on-task observations, frequency of student interruptions, weekly i-Ready usage data, and teacher anecdotal notes and reflection logs. These measurement tools align directly with my research question and allow for a more comprehensive understanding of instructional impact.

Overall, the readings and videos clarified that action research is not a series of disconnected steps, but a coherent and intentional process. By clearly defining the problem, aligning the research question, and planning data collection in advance, I now have a structured guide to follow as I move forward with my action research design. This process has strengthened my confidence in conducting practitioner-based research that is purposeful, reflective, and grounded in real classroom practice.

Reference

Mertler, C. A. (2020). *Action research: Improving schools and empowering educators* (5th ed.).

SAGE Publications.