Action Research: The Teacher as Researcher in the EFL Classroom

Dr. Ryan James, Ed.D.

E-mail – drjames@aces-hungary.org

American Council for English Studies (ACES) – Hungary
1072 Budapest
Akácfa u. 18, IV/24
Hungary

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WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO GET OUT OF THIS WORKSHOP?

Goal Ranking Exercise

1. Please list three to five goals you hope to accomplish through participating in this workshop.

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<th>Miss</th>
<th>Your Goals for the Workshop</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
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2. Now rank your goals in terms of their relative importance. Make the most important #1, the next most important #2, and so on.

3. After hearing the presenter’s goals, circle the plus sign (+) in front of each of your goals that nearly or completely matches one of the presenter’s. Circle the minus sign (-) in front of each of your goals not mentioned by the presenter.

How closely matched were your goals to the presenter's goals for the workshop? How do your goals for a semester class match the goals of your students’ goals? We will come back to this a bit later.

MY GOALS FOR THIS WORKSHOP

 ✓ Provide a brief overview of the differences between Qualitative and Quantitative Research
 ✓ Provide a brief overview of Action Research
 ✓ Share with you ways to identify and clarify your teaching goals
 ✓ Share with you ways to assist your students in identifying and clarifying their educational goals
 ✓ Introduce you to classroom research and classroom assessment techniques
 ✓ Provide you with established classroom assessment Tools as a starting point for your own research in the future
 ✓ Inspire you to want to be researchers in your classes
What Is the Tint of Your Glasses?

On the sheet of paper that has been handed out, you will see a picture of eyeglasses. In the lens of the eyeglasses, I would like you write a word or draw a little symbol in response to the questions that I will read to you. Do not worry about your ability to draw.

What is the country of your birth?

What is your ethnic identity?

What is the best part of teaching for you?

What is the most discouraging part of teaching for you?

How would your students describe you as a teacher?

What do you want to change, if anything, about your teaching methods?

Objectives:

- To show that seeing things differently is okay
- To experience how different viewpoints help us to see the whole picture
- To build a better understanding that our different backgrounds give us different perspectives
- To promote multicultural awareness and understanding
- To recognize that all students perceive things and express themselves in different ways, just as you did today.
Action research is one of a number of different qualitative research methodologies. Qualitative research is substantially different from Quantitative research.

Quantitative Research originated in the biological sciences. The researcher starts with a hypothesis, designs an experiment, has controls, variables, conducts the experiment, analyzes the data and produces numeric results from which a conclusion is based.

Qualitative Research engages in action and research results at the same time. The good news is that there are no mathematical formulas, no numbers to analyze, and incorporates what teachers do naturally, talking. In many ways, it is similar to research models used in Social Work, where the researcher is attempting to be a “Change Agent”. The action researcher, in education, is attempting to make inquiries and then assist in facilitating change in order to improve the quality of instruction, improve the quality of an educational system or its performance.

Often, qualitative research is designed and performed by practitioners who are interested in the resulting data to improve their own practice.

Individuals can do action research, typically in their own classrooms or by teams of colleagues. The team approach is called collaborative inquiry and is usually focuses on a larger system:

- multiple classes
- a program within the school
- the school itself

Action research has the potential to generate authentic and continuing improvements in classrooms and schools. It provides educators the opportunity to contemplate and reassess their teaching. Educators have new data with which to explore and test new ideas, retool their methods of teaching, reevaluate the materials they use, and then to assess and reassess how effective the new approaches were. They are then able to share feedback with fellow team members and to make decisions about which new approaches or materials to include in the team's curriculum, instruction, and assessment plans.
What are the mechanisms of Action Research?

Action research is:

- **cyclic** - similar stages reoccur in a planned succession
- **participatory** - the clients (students, colleagues) and informants (the researcher) are involved as active and often equal participants in the research process
- **qualitative** - it deals primarily with language rather than with numbers
- **reflective** - critical reflection upon the process and outcomes are important parts of each cycle
- **dynamic** – action needs to be taken after the data is collected to implement the changes, it has to be responsive
- **evaluative** – reassess the implemented changes to determine if the needed changes have been corrected

In most circumstances, the use of qualitative research increases receptiveness. In the classroom, the student feels like their voice is being heard and they are eager to participate. It is non-judgmental; therefore, it is less threatening to individuals, programs, or systems.

The research is conducted in a natural language, which is more comfortable for the participants and the researcher alike.

The mediocre teacher… tells.
The good teacher… explains.
The superior teacher… demonstrates.
The great teacher… inspires.

Mikki Williams
One crucial step in each cycle consists of critical reflection. The researcher and others involved first recollect and then critique what has already happened. The increased understanding, which emerges from the critical reflection, is then put to good use in designing the later steps.

The steps are:

- Identify a question or concern to research
- Plan your questions for the participants based on your concern
- Involve your participants with the questions to be answered
- Reflect on the data collected
- Plan an action based on the data
- Re-assess the results after the change has been implemented

Identify a question or concern to research

Prepare your method of fact finding. What questions do you have about what changes you think need to be made? Who will you approach with your questions? Students, colleagues?

Reflect on the data by looking for reoccurring themes.

Take the first action by involving participants. Have them answer your questions and collect the data.

Plan an action to be taken based on the data results.

Re-evaluate after the action has been implemented to verify if it created the intended change.
Yea, yea, yea! So, what practical way can we use this in our own classroom?

Classroom assessment techniques are a form of Action Research.

**Classroom Assessment is:**

A way to assess whether students are learning what teachers think they are teaching.

My focus will be on helping you learn to use existing assessments as well as to design both planned and spontaneous assessments that will provide you with feedback from your students. This will help you facilitate their learning in the most powerful way. You just may learn a bunch too!

Please let me know if you try one or more of the ideas. My e-mail address is on the cover of this handout. I would appreciate learning what you discovered about your students and their learning in your courses.

I will be showing you how you can learn to assess:

- student awareness as learners
- student responses to our pedagogy
- student mastery of course content with other than objective testing quickly, painlessly, and without a lot of extra work.
As a teacher, you are probably thinking, “How will I benefit from this? I am already overworked and underpaid!”

The benefits to you as instructors are:

- professionalism in your approach to student learning
- intellectual renewal and enthusiasm
- discussion with colleagues who are conducting similar assessments
- enhanced learning in your classroom
- empowering your students to enhance their learning skills
- curriculum enhancement
- curriculum vita embellishment

“Most teachers would agree that the primary goal of education is to teach students how to learn on their own.”

Kenneth Graham and H. Alan Robinson
Assessment Tool Number 1

Goal Assessment

To begin, I would like you to consider asking your students their goals for the class. Ask them to list three goals and rank them in importance. Think about how powerful this is in terms of getting them to begin to invest in your course! Their focus will be on your topic the first day!

Next, tell them your goals (which may be listed in your syllabus) and ask them to check off where your goals match theirs. This is similar to what we did at the beginning of this workshop. If they have goals remaining, ask them to share these and give them explanations as to why their goal is not addressed in your course or let them know you will keep in mind the interest they have expressed. Make notes of these goals on the board and ask one class member to record them for you, so you can continue with the discussion.

You can choose to collect these goals, with or without names, or you can consider the activity over when the discussion is concluded.

The purpose of this activity is to dispel myths about your course content and to allow students to let you know their interests. You may be able to customize your material with examples relevant to student goals without changing your curriculum at all!

Students report that they feel validated in courses where instructors ask for feedback. This is so important, especially in large lecture courses. Students also describe instructors who use feedback throughout the semester as more approachable and supportive.

This is a goal assessment to help me understand what is of utmost importance to you for this course. Give me your feedback! If you wish to, you may put your name on the bottom of the sheet, but you are free to remain anonymous.

Please list three goals you have for this class. Rank them in order of importance to you.

1. _____________________________________________________________

2. _____________________________________________________________

3. _____________________________________________________________
Assessment Tool Number Two

The One-Minute Paper

This is a very simple technique. Some instructors use this regularly, some infrequently. Ask students to take some time at the end of your class to answer two questions:

1) What was the most important thing you learned in class today?
2) What questions remain uppermost in your mind?

The purpose is to see if students learned what you wanted them to learn and if they can state it in their own words. Also, with the open-ended questions, you can learn what needs clarification or about possible extensions of the material that would be meaningful to your students.

You can handle the feedback in a couple of ways. You can take it with you and select some good responses to read at the start of the next class. This allows for continuity between classes, a review of the most important points, and a model for stating this content. You can choose a couple of questions to answer or provide references for the answers to questions posed.

If you want to save time, you can have students do a “grand pass” by passing the papers four or five times and then asking them to volunteer to read good answers and questions prior to the end of class. This accomplishes almost the same goal, with the exception of the students knowing you have read each response. Personally, this is not my favorite option, since it does not give the students a sense of my complete involvement in caring what they say.

You have learned about assessing student goals, asking for the most valuable lesson learned from the class presentation and what questions remain in your student’s minds.

Tell me what is on your mind!
1. What was the most important thing you learned in class today?

2. What questions remain uppermost in your mind?
Classroom Climate

Your students are living breathing human beings. They have concerns, fears, and inhibitions just as they most likely have many positive qualities that they bring to the classroom.

Some of these concerns or fears, like working in groups, may be unavoidable in a language classroom. When the student shares their feelings and receives your feedback, they at least know that you are aware that it may not be their best activity. You might be able to make some adjustments in your thinking or in class structure. Bear this in mind when it comes time to assign grades.

1. How do you feel about working in a group?

2. How do you feel about giving and receiving feedback from fellow students?

3. What would you like more or less of in this class?

4. What do you like best and least about this class?

5. What is your view about the amount of time devoted to certain class activities?
Assessment Tool Number Four
Assessing Motivation

1) Rate your dedication to your academic career on the following scale:

   Low                     High
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

2) Rate your expected dedication to your future profession.

   Low                     High
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

3) If your scores are not the same, briefly explain why.

   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

4) If your score for your profession is higher, what do you think causes this greater dedication?

   ____________________________________________________________

5) After being asked these questions, what has it made you realize or think about?

   ____________________________________________________________
Assessment Tool Number Five

The RSQC2 Technique

**Recall** List the most interesting, significant, or useful points of the previous session (meaning part of a class period) or at the end of a class.

**Summarize** Summarize important points in one meaningful sentence.

**Questions** Raise any questions you have about that session.

**Comment** Write down a word or phrase describing how you felt about that session while you were in it.

**Connect** Connect what you learned in that session with what came before or what you think will come next.

Assessment Tool Number Six

Focused Listening

List 5-7 words or short phrases which define/describe what “*Insert your topic here*” means to you:

1. __________________________
2. __________________________
3. __________________________
4. __________________________
5. __________________________
6. __________________________
7. __________________________
Assessment Tool Number Seven

Students As Listeners

This is a good assessment for when you do not think your students are hearing what you are saying or you have noticed that your students are not as responsive as you expect them to be. This is a good tool to keep handy for spontaneous assessments.

How fully and consistently were you concentrating on the lecture (discussion, exercise, or whatever is happening at the time) during these few minutes?

________________________________________________________________________

If you got distracted, how did you bring your attention back into focus?

________________________________________________________________________

What were you doing to record the information?

________________________________________________________________________

How successful were you?

________________________________________________________________________

What were you doing to make connections between this new information and what you already know?

________________________________________________________________________

What did you expect to come next in the lecture (discussion, exercise, or whatever is happening at the time) and why?

________________________________________________________________________
Assessment Tool Number Eight

One Sentence Summary (WDWWHWWW)

Besides being an assessment tool, you may want to consider using this as a story starter or a game. Below is a filled in sample of how this can be applied.

Who? Teachers

Does/Did
Will do what? assess

To whom/what? their students’ learning

When? regularly during the school semester

Where? in their own class

How? using Action Research: Classroom Assessment Techniques and any other appropriate tools and methods of inquiry

Why? so that they can understand and improve their teaching effectiveness and the quality of student learning

Assessment Tool Number Nine

The Muddiest Point*

What was the “muddiest” point in today’s class? (In other words, what was least clear to you?) This is sometimes called “The Foggiest Point”. With either title, it may give you a teaching opportunity to discuss clarity using an analogy.

____________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

*This classroom assessment technique was developed by Dr. Frederick Mosteller, Professor of Statistics at Harvard University
Assessment Tool Number Ten

Assessing Exam Preparation

How many hours will you study for the next exam? ___________________

What specifically will you do to prepare? ______________________________

What grade do you expect to earn? __________

What has being asked these questions made you think about?

____________________________________________________________________

Assessment Tool Number Eleven

Post Exam Assessment

Did you achieve the grade you were working toward? __________

If you did, what did you do to study that helped you be successful?

____________________________________________________________________

If you did not, what do you think you can do better next time to earn a higher grade?

____________________________________________________________________

What can I do to assist you in getting a higher grade on the next exam?

____________________________________________________________________
Assessment Tool Number Twelve

Content Mastery

Write a one-sentence summary for ________.

What was the most important thing you learned in class today?

________________________________________________________________________

What do you think of when you hear the word ____________.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Assessment Tool Number Thirteen

Directed Paraphrasing*

In no more than 3 concise sentences, summarize what you have learned about _______________ in order to transmit that learning to an interested, fellow student who happened to miss a class.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Second, paraphrase the same concept again, but this time for fellow student friend who is not attending this school, but is also studying what we are.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Assessment Tool Number Fourteen
Informal Assessment on Teaching

Instructions: Please give a brief, but honest answer to the questions below.

What are 1 or 2 specific things your instructor does that help you stay active and engaged in class?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

What are 1 or 2 specific things your instructor does that help you to be an active learner in this class?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

What are 1 or 2 specific things your instructor does that make it difficult for you to be an active learner and engaged at times in this class?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Please give your instructor 1 or 2 specific, practical suggestions on ways to help you stay engaged and improve your active learning in this class.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Assessment Tool Number Fifteen

Group Work Plus and Minus

Group work is more enjoyable and productive to me when...
1. __________________________________
2. __________________________________
3. __________________________________
4. __________________________________
5. __________________________________
6. __________________________________
7. __________________________________

Group work is less enjoyable and productive to me when...
1. __________________________________
2. __________________________________
3. __________________________________
4. __________________________________
5. __________________________________
6. __________________________________
7. __________________________________
Now we will ask them to give us feedback about our course design in preparation for next semester. As you select your texts and materials for next semester, you are thinking about any changes you want to make in your course. This semester's students are the best source of information about the success of your pedagogy!

You can choose to assess the entire course with global questions such as:

What changes would you make in this course?

What would you like me to know about your experience in this class at this point?

Reflect on the various types of teaching methods I have used in this course. What is your response to these methods, what changes would you suggest and why?

What unanswered questions do you have?

What improvements can you suggest for the future?

Comments on these questions will be used to design future classes and to address your specific concerns. They are a way for you to have a say in your education, and for us to see how we are doing in relation to our goals.
Assessment Tool Number Seventeen

End of Semester Feedback – Specific Areas

You can focus your assessment on particular aspects of the course such as: assignments, exams, amount of reading, balance of delivery methods (lecture, group work, video, internet) and any other aspect that you would like to improve. Such questions might include:

What is your view regarding the types of assignments you have done this course?

What is your opinion about the types of exams you have taken in this course?

What do you think about the balance of activities in the course such as lecture, group work, video, and Internet research?

What assignments have been most meaningful and in what ways have these contributed to your mastery of this subject?

What did you especially like about the materials (texts, hand-outs) for this course?

What did you especially dislike about the materials (texts, hand-outs) for this course?

Comments on these questions will be used to design future classes and to address your specific concerns. They are a way for you to have a say in your education, and for us to see how we are doing in relation to our goals.
Assessment Tool Number Eighteen

Awareness As Learners: End Of The Semester

Looking back, how would you rate your commitment to this class? Is it different from your rating at the beginning of the semester? If, yes, how is it different?

________________________________________________________________________

How much time did you spend on homework each week? ______________

Do you think you could have spent more or less and why? ______________

________________________________________________________________________

What did you do to prepare for exams in this class? ______________

________________________________________________________________________

Did the strategies work or do they need re-tooling? If they need re-tooling, how will you refine them in the future? ______________

________________________________________________________________________

Name four things you wanted to learn in this class. ______________

________________________________________________________________________

If you did not achieve the grade you desired, what are you planning to do differently in the future? ______________

________________________________________________________________________

Rate your attendance in this class. ______________

________________________________________________________________________

What were your worries and concerns about this class? Looking back, were they real or imaginary? ______________

________________________________________________________________________
Assessment Tool Number Nineteen

Letters To Next Semester’s Students

Write a letter to next semester’s students telling them how to succeed in this class.

Give them your ideas about what to study and how to do well on exams.

Let them know your opinion about computer usage, the practice tests, outlines, extra credit, debates, reading checks, and quizzes. (Teachers should fill in what is pertinent to their course)
SUGGESTED READING:


Sagor, R. *How to conduct collaborative action research*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.


Further Reading

Prepared by Mark K. Smith © Mark K. Smith First listing: July 1996

This select, annotated, bibliography has been designed to give a flavour of the possibilities of action research and includes some useful guides to practice.

Explorations of action research:

Atweh, B., Kemmis, S. and Weeks, P. (eds.) (1998) Action Research in Practice: Partnership for Social Justice in Education, London: Routledge. Presents a collection of stories from action research projects in schools and a university. The book begins with theme chapters discussing action research, social justice and partnerships in research. The case study chapters cover topics such as: school environment - how to make a school a healthier place to be; parents - how to involve them more in decision-making; students as action researchers; gender - how to promote gender equity in schools; writing up action research projects.

Carr, W. and Kemmis, S. (1986) Becoming Critical. Education, knowledge and action research, Lewes: Falmer. Influential book that provides a good account of ‘action research’ in education. Chapters on teachers, researchers and curriculum; the natural scientific view of educational theory and practice; the interpretative view of educational theory and practice; theory and practice - redefining the problem; a critical approach to theory and practice; towards a critical educational science; action research as critical education science; educational research, educational reform and the role of the profession.

Carson, T. R. and Sumara, D. J. (ed.) (1997) Action Research as a Living Practice, New York: Peter Lang. 140 pages. Book draws on a wide range of sources to develop an understanding of action research. Explores action research as a lived practice, ‘that asks the researcher to not only investigate the subject at hand but, as well, to provide some account of the way in which the investigation both shapes and is shaped by the investigator.

Dadds, M. (1995) Passionate Enquiry and School Development. A story about action research, London: Falmer. 192 + ix pages. Examines three action research studies undertaken by a teacher and how they related to work in school - how she did the research, the problems she experienced, her feelings, the impact on her feelings and ideas, and some of the outcomes. In his introduction, John Elliot comments that the book is ‘the most readable, thoughtful, and detailed study of the potential of action-research in professional education that I have read’.

and modifying practice. Includes advice on how working in this way can aid the professional development of action researcher and practitioner.

Quigley, B. A. and Kuhne, G. W. (eds.) (1997) *Creating Practical Knowledge Through Action Research*, San Francisco: Jossey Bass. Guide to action research that outlines the action research process, provides a project planner, and presents examples to show how action research can yield improvements in six different settings, including a hospital, a university and a literacy education program.


**Action research guides:**

Elliot, J. (1991) *Action Research for Educational Change*, Buckingham: Open University Press. 163 + x pages Collection of various articles written by Elliot in which he develops his own particular interpretation of action research as a form of teacher professional development. In some ways close to a form of 'reflective practice'.

McNiff, J. (1988) *Action Research. Principles and practice*, London: Macmillan. Basic introduction. Chapters on the nature of action research; action research as an educational tradition; current trends; how to start a study; making sense of the data; and claims to validity.


Winter, R. (1989) *Learning From Experience. Principles and practice in action research*, Lewes: Falmer Press. 200 + 10 pages. Introduces the idea of action research; the basic process; theoretical issues; and provides six principles for the conduct of action research. Includes examples of action research. Further chapters on from principles to practice; the learner's experience; and research topics and personal interests.