

The Action Research Project

The basic idea behind this action research project is to try to glean information about our teaching from the point of view of classroom observation and in a more empirical nature. The focus here, following the action research paradigm, is to identify and analyze elements of classroom teaching and the overall class situation and to see how such elements could be improved. This is all about solving problems and making our teaching situation better for both teachers and students, goals that clearly fall into the paradigm of the Practicum.

Practicum students can conduct this research in their own current teaching situation (if the setting is conducive) or in a special class established just for this purpose at the university. People working alone are responsible for setting things up and carrying them out in an acceptable manner. In the university provided and organized class, Practicum students/researchers, work in groups of twos and/or threes and receive guidance and assistance from their partners and the course instructor. All projects need to work through the four basic Action Research movements. In the end, each individual or group will prepare an Action Research report which is to be included as an important part of their portfolios.

Movement One - Plan

Researchers will first need to identify a particular problem or area of concern in the classroom. This could be an area of their own concern that the teachers themselves have noticed or it may be generated from outside observation. It could be a student-generated concern. In the former, careful analysis of reflection journals may reveal a particular area which all parties involved have become concerned with during the course of teaching a particular class. The latter may involve giving surveys to students and seeing what the students themselves perceive as being either problems with the class or areas which they are mostly concerned about in their own development. The first movement is all about identifying a particular area to be researched and confronted. Essentially, researchers are to think of this as observation-based research. Thus, the research should be based on observation and the goal is not to show something but to find an issue that will be addressed in the following parts of the research.

Movement Two – Act

Once an area has been identified through observation, and sufficiently contextualized through triangulated research then the second movement basically involves developing a treatment through trial and error. This will probably involve making certain changes to what normally happens in the classroom related to the area that is being focused on. Basically, certain treatments will be posited and tried out in the classroom. For the CALL majors, or those such inclined this will obviously be related to the web-based materials and such trial and error will occur on the use and implementation of outside resources for teaching and not necessarily in the classroom alone. Simply put, in the second movement we try to devise possible solutions or treatments designed deal with the problem area. Once more, the treatments are tried out in a systematic way in the classroom – hence the term act.

Movement Three - Observe

In the third movement we accumulate data about the changes/treatments we have made in order to try to find out whether they were effective at all or which changes seem to work the best. Again, observation plays a pivotal role in how we assess the effects of the individual treatments. Basically what we are looking for is some substantiation, some feedback, about what we have done to make the class function better. In this way we can make changes that are deemed more effective by the students themselves or by other stakeholders such as the teachers themselves.

Movement Four – Reflect

In the fourth movement researchers are expected to reflect on everything that has been done as a whole. This can be equated in some ways to the discussion section of an empirical study. Here, the researchers analyze and discuss the overall results.

All in all, you will be given a free hand in choosing not only your areas of concern but also your treatments. Your instructor will, of course, provide guidance and feedback with this. At the end of the course a brief write-up of your efforts regarding this Action Research project will be required from each individual or group (groups write this up together), and will be placed in the portfolio as evidence of teaching development and professionalism. Try to have fun with this and try to use this as a useful tool for not only monitoring but also altering your own classroom behaviors. It should be fun and enlightening.

As far as the timing for this project goes, you will have until Week 5 to come up with an area of concern which you want to focus on (Plan). This gives you about four weeks of class time to try to identify problems or concerns with either something in the class or related to the web materials. After the initial identification of the area of concern, you will then have seven (7) weeks in the class to try out your different treatments (Movements Two and Three), and after each one to glean some information from the students or those affected by those treatments. It is important to remember that you should not wait until the very end, the last moment, in order to observe the effects of the treatments. As soon as you try something new you should survey or observe changes directly afterwards. In the end Practicum people/researchers will then have about two weeks to write up the reflection of the results. Writing up your reflection would be done either alone or with your partner (if you have one) and should be included separately in each of your portfolios. The length of the write-ups should be between approximately 10-12 pages, not counting any of the survey material produced. Please refer to your syllabus to find out the exact dues of the write-ups.

The pre-course reading materials are devoted to the Action Research project, so try to get the book as soon as possible and read through everything carefully.