WS3: Action research as a tool for better quality and efficiency in Erasmus projects

Mg.philol. Nadežda Polianoviča
Cologne, 19/06/2018
Discussion round: What is a qualitative project?

• What is Quality? Look at the pictures and think what makes these things qualitative?
• How can you relate this to ErasmusKA1+ project quality?
• Write your recommendations concerning features of a qualitative project under each photo
• Which features are the most important in a qualitative project?
• Which features are not worth our attention?
What is quality?

- ISO standard defines **quality** as “*the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bears its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs*”
- **Quality** is a degree to which a set of inherent characteristics of an object fulfils requirements
- Requirements are needs or expectations that are stated, generally implied or obligatory

International Organisation of Sandartisation (ISO) 9000:2015 3.6.2
Why do we need Action Research?

Reflections from the ECML project Action research communities for language teachers in Graz, May, 2018
ECML Programme 2016-2019
Languages at the heart of learning [www.ecml.at](http://www.ecml.at)

**Action Research** is one of the 8 projects within the long-term initiative “Languages at the heart of Learning”
Action research communities for language teachers

• **Project webpage:** [www.ecml.at/actionresearch](http://www.ecml.at/actionresearch)

• Aims of the project: ‘To contribute towards quality enhancement in the language classroom through the application of action research approaches by tapping into existing networks and creating new communities which can be replicated across ECML member states’

• **32 participants** - High school, Secondary and Primary School teachers, inspectors and educationalists from the EU and ECML member states
Action research is the process by which practitioners attempt to study their problems scientifically in order to guide, correct and evaluate their decisions and actions.

Stephen Corey (1953)
One more Action Research model
by Susman, 1983

1. DIAGNOSING

2. ACTION PLNNING

3. TAKING ACTION

4. EVALUATING

5. SPECIFYING LEANING
Action Research Definitions

• Action research is a three-step spiral process of planning, taking action and fact-finding about the results of the action

  Kurt Lewin (1947)

• Action research is the process by which practitioners attempt to study their problems scientifically in order to guide, correct and evaluate their decisions and actions,

  Stephen Corey (1953)

• Studying whatever you are doing

  E.Calhoun in Scott Willis
Benefits of Action Research or Why AR?

“Action Research encourages change in schools, empowers individuals through collaboration with one another, encourages teacher reflection and examines new methods and ideas”

Action Research examples:
“What I did as a classroom teacher in London”
by Angela Gallagher-Brett, SOAS, University of London

- **Identified a problem** with speaking spontaneously & keeping going among beginners in the language classroom
- **Designed a project** in a series of communication strategies was taught to a class of 11-12 year olds learning German
- **Used a questionnaire** at the beginning of the research
- **Taught a programme** of communication strategies over 8 weeks
- **Recorded** oral interactions in pairs at the end
- **Used a questionnaire** at the end of the research
Benefits of Action Research or Why AR?

- Erasmus+ KA1 ‘Implementing CLIL in project work’ 2014-2016 – 12 project participants – How to achieve the long term effect in my KA1 project?
  - to ensure the quality and long term effect of Erasmus + and other European projects
- OECD results and other statistics
  - to know why and what exactly should we do if to do it at all
- New trends in education policy: “Integration of subjects through Big Ideas” or “Competence based approach”
  - to make it happen taking into account not only theoretical but also practical considerations and recommendations from teachers working at schools not theoreticians
- Good examples from the UK, Finland, Singapur, etc.
  - to understand if we really need to follow all these ‘Good practice examples’; possibly only some of them and in a very particular way
  - to be able to adapt the good practice examples for our situation
Barriers to AR in language teaching

- Action Research is often perceived as additional paperwork that is too complex and time consuming
  - which is not true as AR mostly means more systematic and well-organised NOT additional work

- lack of knowledge concerning research methods
  - teachers need both practical and theoretical guidance and support to start their independent AR

- lack of support & motivation to do the research
  - “All teachers are researchers” can become a positive moto for many teachers; however, AR cannot and should not be a must and unpleasant obligation for everyone

- lack of power or inability to influence the situation
  - teachers should be able to influence their teaching and introduce some changes in education at the school level if the research results prove the necessity of such changes; if teachers feel powerless there is no use of any research
What is necessary for a good **collective** Action Research project?

1. Idea of a problem–solution or a research question
2. Theoretical basis (What are the assumptions, hypothesis or a research question? What are the main approaches and theories? What is the statistics? What are the steps of stages?)
3. A well-planned step by step structure of the project including the timeline, description of the steps and project guidelines including important definitions and recommendations how to do it (+possibly an introductory /explanatory course for teachers)
4. Prepared samples of materials for the research (lesson plans; handouts and texts for teachers and students; research questionnaires and tables for results and statistics)
5. Constant or at least sometimes available support from the project coordinators or course providers
Modern theories supporting Action Research
New Trends in Research- Variation Theory
Variation Theory

- To see the butterfly one should try to look at it from different angles (or try different variants)
- When we find the right angle and see the “flying butterfly” as the whole – the meaning has been constructed
- To find a solution or improve our teaching practice we need to look at it from different angles, considering different variables
Do you see a musician or a girl's face?
• When you see the girl’s face you don’t see the musician and when you see the musician you are losing the girl ...

• While teaching and learning one thing (e.g. Present Perfect) we forget about or lose the other(s) (e.g. Past Simple) – our aim is to see the whole picture and be able to use all the tenses

• Fragmentary knowledge or fragmentary learning is what modern education is trying to get rid of
Variation Theory
（變易理論）

Ference Marton
the University of Gothenburg

Variation Theory and the Improvement of Teaching and Learning (2012)
https://gupea.ub.gu.se/bitstream/2077/29645/5/gupea_2077_29645_5.pdf
Variation Theory

• According to Marton’s Theory of Variation, discernment of critical features occurs under systematic interaction between a learner and the thing to be learnt, and variation is the agent that generates such interaction (Marton, Runesson, & Tsui, 2004).

• Variation, therefore, is a primary factor in encouraging student learning.

• Marton and Tsui (2004) specify four patterns of variation were proposed: 1) contrast, 2) generalization, 3) separation and 4) fusion. 
http://kb.edu.hku.hk/variation_theory.html
Phenomenography

- is a qualitative research methodology, within the interpretivist paradigm, that investigates the qualitatively different ways in which people experience something or think about something.
- seeks to answer questions such as ‘What are the different ways of experiencing a phenomenon?’
- focuses on “constituting a structure of meaning” (Åkerlind, 2005).

https://iiqm.wordpress.com/2014/08/12/experiencing-phenomena/
Possible Action Research variables which can be modified in your teaching practice:

- Students’ actions + Teacher’s actions
- Method + Attitude
- Tools + Type of Assessment
- Place + Time
- Materials + Types of Hometask
- Type of Students’ grouping

= Result
When doing your first AR it is better to select only one particular variable that will be modified in your research:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>students</th>
<th>tasks</th>
<th>tools</th>
<th>time allocation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Grouping students (individually, in pairs, in groups, etc.)</td>
<td>• essay</td>
<td>• textbook</td>
<td>• 5 min. every lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Motivating students taking into account their interests, hobbies, interests, character features, fears, ambitions, problems, etc.</td>
<td>• letter</td>
<td>• dictionary</td>
<td>• 15 min. every lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• presentation</td>
<td>• handouts</td>
<td>• 30 min. once a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• monologue</td>
<td>• computer</td>
<td>• as a hometask for a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• dialogue</td>
<td>• mobile phone</td>
<td>• etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• text analysis</td>
<td>• the internet (particular website e.g. <a href="http://www.ted.com">www.ted.com</a>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• reading comprehension</td>
<td>• blackboard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• grammar task (using Present Perfect and Past Simple)</td>
<td>• whiteboard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• vocabulary task (multiple choice, word formation, etc.)</td>
<td>• Notes,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Task: Look at the Erasmus KA1 courses and think about possible variables for an Action Research

- Nature as a fantastic classroom for learning
- Theatre and English
- Assessing your students’ thinking skills
- CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning)
- ICT for teaching
- Developing creativity, motivation and curiosity
- Individualised learning in Swedish schools
- Requirements and practice of Advancement in Finnish schools
Cooperation offer!

• If you are interested in Action Research you are very welcome to visit the ECML project webpage: [www.ecml.at/actionresearch](http://www.ecml.at/actionresearch)

• And if you teach English to 12-19 year olds (7th-12th forms) and would like to get involved in an Action Research project “Vocabulary learning using critical thinking strategies and techniques” please contact me: polianovic[at]yahoo.com
References


Key influencers on action research in the UK

• John Elliott
  [http://www.actionresearch.gr/AR/ActionResearch_Vol1/Issue01_01_p01-03.pdf](http://www.actionresearch.gr/AR/ActionResearch_Vol1/Issue01_01_p01-03.pdf)

Kemmis & McTaggart

• Jean McNiff  Action Research for Professional Development McNiff
Thank you !