

Date: February 9, 2010

English Roundtable Web Chat on **“Action Research II”**

Abstract:

In our last English Roundtable Web Chat we had great discussions about Action Research: what does it mean? How may AR benefit English teachers and teacher researchers alike? We also shared the challenges and questions that teachers may encounter when they are doing AR as part of their professional development. In this webchat, we will continue our discussion on Action Research. We will examine the quality of action research questions as well as discussing how we may move on to the next stages as to design the research, collect data, etc.

Note: Two attachments include pre-submitted questions for the chat and tips on action research.

Transcript

Damon Anderson: Hello Everyone and welcome to our February English Roundtable Web Chat. We will begin at 4pm (Beijing Time; GMT +8). Please feel free to leave any pre-questions or comments related to our topic as stated in the note box to the left. Thank you.

Damon Anderson 2: Hello everyone. Thank you for coming. We will start in about 7 minutes.

Damon Anderson 2: Hello everyone. Thank you all for coming. We are ready to begin our second chat on Action Research (AR).

Damon Anderson 2: We want to thank everyone who submitted a question for us to look at today and comment on.

Damon Anderson 2: These are in the Power Point (ppt) above this box. I hope you have all had a chance to look at them. If not, please do so now.

Damon Anderson 2: I will take down the note pod to the left in a couple of minutes and put up another ppt on the steps to take when forming a question and some caveats.

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: Hello, I'm Huong from FTU. I didn't attend the previous session but the content sounds very interesting to my teaching job

Damon Anderson 2: Thank you for joining us, Huong. It doesn't matter that you weren't here last month.

Damon Anderson 2: I am going to move in another ppt now for us to look at together.

Fidelia: Hello everyone. This is Fidelia, English Language Fellow from USA in Thailand. Thanks, Damon.

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: thank you

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: Hi Fidelia and Damon

Hong Nguyen : Hello and thank you very much for opening this forum for us English teachers. My observation is that Vietnamese students seldom ask questions. They tend to place themselves in the position of answering questions, rather than asking questions (even the ones they really want to ask) and I believe that the ability to ask questions can enhance learning a foreign language (as much as learning other subjects). My research question is "how to enable Vietnamese students to get used to asking questions in their General English class?" Could you tell if this is a researchable question? Or maybe a better way of putting it? Thank you.

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: Hi Hong, pls specify what skill you are teaching in your class?

Damon Anderson 2: In the ppt at the top, there should be a grid that did not show up. It has at the top: The Situation, and underneath it the questions: Why? Where? Who? What? and How?

Damon Anderson 2: These are the key questions to think about.

Damon Anderson 2: If you can see the example, it becomes a little more clear on how to begin your question?

Fidelia: So Step 1 is identifying the "problem"?

Damon Anderson 2: Beginning the question to research is the most difficult part of Action Research. If you have a good question, you are half way there.

Damon Anderson 2: Yes, Fidelia. You are correct.

Damon Anderson 2: Most people make the mistake of not really articulating the issue well. So, their question becomes too broad and is not really measurable.

Phi Thi Khoa: How can I know that my research question is good?

Fidelia: This approach is helpful. It seems like one that's intended for a group of teachers or department to undertake the AR together. What is the source of these steps?

Damon Anderson 2: Look at the check list above. Points two and three are where most people fall down in writing their questions.

Damon Anderson 2: I'll ask Ping to write down the citations in a note pod we can post later. They are on the bottom of the page that is not legible at the moment.

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: The checklist looks good

Damon Anderson 2: Here are some steps, but we will come back to these. i would like to go to the caveats first, if you don't mind.

Fidelia: Thanks, Damon. It would be nice to have access to this after the chat.

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: but if a teacher has to teach the subject alone, she will have to answer all those questions on her own. In that case, will her answers alone be reliable for a research to be carried on?

Damon Anderson 2: We can email this ppt to anyone who would like it. Just send Ping an email requesting it.

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: that would be great

Phi Thi Khoa: Who is Ping?

Damon Anderson 2: Huong, yes, a single teacher's interpretation would be as valid as a group of teachers. It really depends on the study and what you want to accomplish with it.

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: we have his email in the inviting email to the web chat

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: thank Damon

Phi Thi Khoa: I would like to have that slides. it seems too fast for me to read

Wang Ping 2: Fidelia, you're right. They are taken out of the book Teacher-Centered Professional Development by Gabriel Diaz-Maggioli (2004) on doing collaborative action research, published by Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Alexandria, Virginia, USA

Damon Anderson 2: Notice in the steps that writing the question is step number 4, not number 1.

Phi Thi Khoa: is it his email address wangpx1@state.gov?

Wang Ping 2: Sorry everyone. This is Wang Ping. I just had some problem posting messages. Now it seems all right. Please feel free to send me an email if you want a copy of the PPT as well as the sources that they are taken from.

Damon Anderson 2: Can I take down this ppt for a moment and let us look at some of the questions that came in before the chat?

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: I have done those steps in my teaching practice but I did not transcribe the lesson, I only noted the changes.

Fidelia: Sure. Now that we have in mind the steps and caveats, that would be helpful.

Damon Anderson 2: Let's look at what was sent in in the next ppt. You can go through this one at your own pace.

Fidelia: Will we discuss the RQs one by one to keep us on "the same page"?

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: good idea, Fidelia

Damon Anderson 2: Good idea. Let's look at the first question which is really a question about AR and not an AR question. What would your answer be to this question?

Fidelia: Yes, this sounds like a RQ on the merits of AR.

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: I think that a teacher with a mind on teaching improvement and AR will keep her/himself thinking and reflecting all the time about his/her practice

Damon Anderson 2: Any teacher who engages in AR in a serious way, can only benefit by it. It will greatly inform her/his teaching.

Damon Anderson 2: Any good practice learned through AR can only benefit the community in which the teacher teaches, as well as the broader community.

Fidelia: Hard to address out of context and before trying it out in one's context. Hopefully, a group of teachers would find that their efforts united them in improving their departmental approaches and policies in addition to whatever specifics their research would lead to.

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: and at the same time, their students will benefit

Wang Ping 2: for Question 1, it is a good topic, but I think it is too broad and general, therefore it'll be hard to measure the effectiveness of the action to be taken

Damon Anderson 2: Let's look at question 2. Is this a good AR question, that is is it ready for research?

Fidelia: "effective" would need to be defined

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: This question needs more definition of the situation: Who, what, where, how, why

Damon Anderson 2: Yes, that is true, Fidelia. Terms like effective should be defined, or better words used.

Fidelia: Yes, and also, what is the problem in the first place.

Damon Anderson 2: Both Huong and Fidelia have the right ideas. We have no context for the question.

Damon Anderson 2: What kind of reading? To what level students?

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: If the writer of the question is here, s/he can specify and we can discuss more

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: also, what is the objectives of teaching/learning reading skill here?

Fidelia: Are authentic materials already being used? Or are the teacher(s) wondering if they should start using authentic materials?

Damon Anderson 2: These are great questions that need to be answered before we could say that this was a question ready for AR. It needs work. But, the basic question is a great one to ask, just refine it for AR.

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: yes, i agree

Damon Anderson 2: I would make the same comments about question number 3. Do you agree?

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: again, this could be a great AR question on condition that it needs more elaboration

Damon Anderson 2: Let's look at question 4. Is this an AR question, or just a question about metacognitive strategies?

Fidelia: The following is a general question. It seems like the steps in the PPT guiding AR presuppose that whatever the subject of inquiry, it's a teaching point that's already being used in the classroom. Is that right? Thus, AR is not a tool for piloting a new teaching technique. Does that make sense?

Damon Anderson 2: It does make sense. However, teachers have used AR when they attempt to add something new into the classroom to see if it improves learning and performance over the method they have been using.

Fidelia: Q4 seems like another kind of RQ--about the nature of learning, not so much about teaching.

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: so what is the difference between a RQ and a ARQ?

Damon Anderson 2: Q5 is getting to the point more of "What if I make the change of adding metacognitive strategies?" this is a good start, but needs more clarification, I believe. The question is, what strategies would I add and how would I measure the effect?

Phanisara: Unless in finding out the answer, that would encourage the teacher to use more of the metacognitive or cognitive strategies in teaching.

Fidelia: Sorry, I'm just using "RQ" to abbreviate the words "research question".

Damon Anderson 2: I think that Q4 is a beginning point looking at the issue, Q5 is the beginning of the AR question, and Q6 is what you hope the results will tell you, so a further clarification of the AR question. A good start.

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: I know Fidelia. I just wonder a bit about the difference between RQ and an ARQ

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: can we say that AR is for teachers to challenge their own teaching practice while RQ is the start of any research?

Wang Ping 2: ARQ may not be just about teaching, but could also focus on students learning, curriculum development, school management, supervision, everything.

Damon Anderson 2: What about question number 7?

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: this is my question :-)

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: tks Ping

Wang Ping 2: In my opinion, why differentiates ARQ from RQ is the letter A-action, something that the researcher wants to try out/implement, after identifying an area, which could be a problem, or something to prove on, and at the end of the study, to see how that action has addressed the problem, or improved the current status quo.

Damon Anderson 2: I liked questions 7 and 8, but feel that they also need more in them. How would you measure the effect of adding Bloom's Taxonomy to the learning process? To know that you first have to say how and when you would add it to the lessons.

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: yes, good advice from Damon

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: when i studied this subject in VNU - my old college, my teacher taught me in a different way

Fidelia: Do you have a way to see and measure "critical thinking" and "student interest"?

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: for the interest, I rely on the survey carried out by the office staff in the end of the semester

Damon Anderson 2: Interest could be measured through a simple combination of a survey and individual interviews with students.

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: but to be honest, "critical thinking" is a hard term to measure

Damon Anderson 2: But you must have a good rubric, so that there is good inter-rater reliability.

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: in the final written exam, I ask them a question that requires their synthesis and evaluation skills

Damon Anderson 2: Critical thinking could be easily measured with tasks and projects that require the students to either add to the information in the readings or transfer that information to another format requiring some added thinking.

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: they did quite well in the test - but to say that this is "critical thinking" might not be ... I am not sure

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: thanks Damon

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: for the advice and suggestions

Damon Anderson 2: For example, a reading could state that Sharon is 28 years old today, and goes on to give other such personal information in a non-explicit fashion. The students would have to fill in a form putting in Sharon's birthday and the other personal information from the reading.

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: Damon, please specify more on the inter-rater reliability. I'm not sure I understand how to carry this out.

Fidelia: On the final question Q9, this seems like a case of a teacher wanting to pilot new materials. This would require steps different from those in the PPT.

Damon Anderson 2: If you have a group of people giving a rating on the same test (oral or written) you need a good rubric to specify the criteria on how you will rate the answers/responses. If all raters rate an answer the same way, then you have inter-rater reliability.

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: another question on Q7: should this be written into 2 separate questions of critical thinking and students' interest or ONE question like Q7 is ok?

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: tks Damon

Wang Ping 2: Thu Huong, what you have been doing with your students sounds exciting.

Fidelia: Maybe we should do a webchat on "making good rubrics"

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: he he, thank you very much. But it worked really well with the first class, while with the second class, it seems boring sometimes for them

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: I agree with Fidelia about the "make good rubrics"

Damon Anderson 2: I agree with Fidelia about question 9. But the author does state that he/she wants to get the students to read more. Perhaps it is just the way the question was stated.

Damon Anderson 2: Well, our time is really up. I hope you all enjoyed this chat today. We have one suggestion for our next web chat in March to be about rubrics. do you all agree?

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: this is also my question

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: the case is that we have a textbook for the semester but all teachers and students get frustrated with the textbook

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: because the information in the textbook is outdated

Wang Ping 2: Our next web chat would be on Tuesday March 9th. Let me know if you want a copy of today's PPT. Thank you all very much for joining us today!

Fidelia: Thanks A LOT Ping and Damon for putting together these Qs and the PPT about AR. I really enjoyed this format of collectively reading, responding, discussing.

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: Thank you very much for the chat

Damon Anderson 2: It was our first time to try it this way, Fidelia. So, thanks for commenting on it.

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: I really enjoy all the information and recommendation I can have today

Wang Ping 2: Thank you Fidelia and Thu Huong for your great input.

Fidelia: No attachment to the "rubrics" suggestion. I don't know how amenable that would be to a webchat. Feel free to do another topic.

Damon Anderson 2: It's a great topic. We'll definitely consider it.

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: Ping, can I type my email address here and could you please send me attachment of the PPT slides?

Wang Ping 2: Thu Huong, I believe I have your email address :)

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: I vote for "rubrics" as well

Damon Anderson 2: Ping and I wish you all a HAPPY NEW YEAR of the TIGER!!!!

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: Thank you so much. I really appreciate today's session - my first participation

Fidelia: Thanks. Yay for tigers! Same to you all.

Wang Ping 2: This year Chinese New Year overlaps with Valentines. Happy holidays to you all!

Nguyen Thu Huong 2: I wish all of you the best things to come in the New Year of Tiger