

NUFS Workshop 2011

*Newsletter No. 1*Workshop in May

(Part 1)

Date: May 7, 2011, 13:00-16:00**Venue:** Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, Room 322**Instructor:** Robert Croker (Nanzan University)**Title:** "The Art and Craft of Action Research"

Abstract: As teachers, we are constantly trying out new ideas, tasks and activities in our classrooms. Action research can help you do this better. Your 'research' identifies something that you'd like to change or improve in your teaching, and it also helps you understand what's already going on in your classroom. The changes that you then make are the 'action'. Continuing to collect information as you try out your new ideas helps you to understand what's happening better, and to make sounder teaching decisions. So together, 'action' and 'research' are a powerful way for you to better understand and improve your teaching.

If you would like to begin doing action research but are not quite sure where to start, or if you are already doing action research but are looking for some new ideas, then this session will help you.

**The number of participants: 28****1. Interesting activities you might want to use in your class. Why?**

- I'm fascinated with the idea of the think aloud. It would be great to hear exactly what the students are thinking as they do the activities.
- I'd like to use student's diaries. It will be a good help for students to reflect their activities in classes.
- I could learn how to start my action research. When I thought of it, I had no idea, but now I feel I can start it somehow, because I want to improve and analyze my teaching skills.
- Action Research itself – but what's happening now can be a very good feedback to solve and to find the problem we are facing and focusing.
- Focus Group – I think I can get many suggestions from focus group.
- Have the students read interesting/funny stories (different ones) and in pairs tell them to each other.
- "Deciding what information to collect" is very interesting, because I haven't thought of Action Research.

2. What you learned from today's workshop.

- Today's workshop both expanded and refined my understanding of A.R. It gave me a great deal to think about with regard to collecting data. It also gave me a



better way to frame A.R. when I introduce it to new teachers.

- The most important thing for me was asking myself the questions about “What is already happening now” in my classroom. This has given me an excellent focused start to my action research, and I now feel confident and comfortable about how to begin.
- I learned to put ‘fact’ questions first, and ‘opinion’ questions later because their opinions could affect the fact. I also learned different ways of collecting data, which is very useful in my action research.
- I learned how to choose a good topic, tools, ways of collecting good information, and so on. Now I’m ready to start!
- I learned a lot today! I envy the participants who joined today’s workshop and conduct AR from now. I have already done my MA with AR project, but I wish I had learned the principal of AR before I started it! I thought I learned so many things from my students through AR interview. I could have learned more through interviews or focus-group. I might have missed so many possible facts or feeling of students.

3. Questions and Answers

Q (1): My interest is reading comprehension but I feel it too broad. I want to know how to narrow down to a focused topic. Probably I need to talk to you instructors over my interests and concrete topics.

A: When you’re just beginning action research, you might be able to decide on your topic, but not be sure what you’d like to focus on. As you start to do your research, though, you will find that you will naturally become more focused on certain parts of your topic – probably the ones that are causing your students some problems, or the part of your teaching that you feel could be better. Follow those interests, and research about them. The narrower the topic, the easier it will be for you to research it properly. You’re also very welcome to talk to Yoshi, Nancy, or any of the other teachers. You might find it useful to chat to another action researcher or friend or colleague, too!



Q (2): Will explaining to students the topic of your action research cause students to give you the answers they think you want?

A: Good question! I think that we should do research with our students, not on our students. So, explaining to them what your research is about and how it can help them have better learning experiences if they are honest with you, tends to inspire your students to give you more honest and more interesting information, particularly when you give them feedback about their ideas. Also, remind them that in action research they are your teachers and you are the learner.

However, if you are still concerned about this, you could make your research more anonymous; for example, you could ask students not to write their names on the questionnaires. Also, you could make sure that the research does not have any impact on their final grades, by making the grading as objective as possible (ie make sure that there are clear criteria for assessing students).

Q (3): Is it possible to see some examples of effective questionnaires?

A: Look in the JALT’s *The Language Teacher*. You can find them online at:

<http://jalt-publications.org/tlt>

Q (4): Any recommended book for qualitative research and quantitative research?

A: Here are a few of my favorites. You can find them on amazon.co.jp

Dornyei, Z. (2007). *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methodologies*. Oxford University Press.

Heigham, J. & Croker, R. A. (2009). *Qualitative Research in Applied Linguistics: A Practical Introduction*. Palgrave Macmillan. [chapters on questionnaires, interviews, observations, case studies, and so on – very useful]

Nunan, D. (1992). *Research Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press.

Punch, K. F. (2009). *Introduction to Research Methods in Education*. Sage. [excellent introduction to both qualitative and quantitative research methods]

Q (5): I'm interested in doing qualitative research. I'd like to know the way how I should analyze the data. I have to analyze the information objectively, otherwise I cannot persuade the audience in academic meetings, although my goal is not to persuade them but to improve my lesson.

A: That's another good question. The purpose of analyzing the information that you collect is to understand it deeply, and to see patterns of ideas and behaviors in there. You want to get to know the data very well. The first step is to read the data closely, making notes about what you see. You want to 'get above' the data, to stand back and see what is there. I will be offering a workshop on data analysis on Sunday July 3rd. If you'd like to join it, please email me at <robertcroker@mac.com>. If you have any, please bring along some data that you'd like to analyze. If not, you can use the data that other participants bring. Alternatively, from amazon, look at:

Burns, A. (2010). *Doing Action Research in English Language Teaching: A Guide for Practitioners*. Routledge. [look at the later chapters]

Bernard, H. R., & Ryan, G. W. (2010). *Analyzing Qualitative Data: Systematic Approaches*. Sage. [a much larger book, with a lot of different ideas]

Q (6): Several years ago, I learned that it was necessary to use statistics software such as SPSS to analyze the data. And it was too difficult for me to use it and that's why I gave up starting my action research. Is there another way to analyze the data?

A: There are two ways of analyzing numerical data – using software like SPSS, or using your calculator! If you would like to know information like the average, the maximum and minimum, and so on, then your calculator is just fine. This is called descriptive analysis – you are describing the numbers that you've collected. For most action research, this is sufficient.

You only need to use SPSS if you want to do statistical procedures like *t*-tests or ANOVA, which are relatively difficult to do and usually not necessary in action research. Such procedures are called inferential statistics.

My rule of thumb is that if you need to buy special software and read a huge thick book, then it probably won't help you with action research – the purpose of which is to provide information to help you



improve your teaching.

If you want a good introduction to using numerical data in action research, see:

Dornyei, Z. (2007). *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methodologies*. Oxford University Press.

(Part 2)

Date: May 8, 2011 9:30-12:30

Venue: Aichi Kenko Plaza, Conference Room 1

Presenter: Miyuki Inoko (Ohkagakuen High School)

Title: Report on my action research

Abstract: In 2008, I had a chance to join a workshop at NUFS, and then started my action research, learning theories of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). I learned how to develop materials adapting communicative activities and realized the importance of the integration of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and the important role they play in making CLT happen in the classroom. I'm going to report on my three years of action research in senior high schools, describe how I taught English through the integration of language skills, the effect of that teaching on students' English competence, and how I improved and adapted my teaching.

Advisors: Kazuyoshi Sato, Nancy Mutoh (NUFS)

The number of participants: 25



Workshop in June (Schedule)

Date: June 11, 2011, 10:30-14:30 (Part 1), 14:30-17:00 (Part 2)

Venue: Nagoya NSC College, Room 31

Instructors: Tim Murphey (Kanda University of International Studies)

Title: "Confluence Strategies: Student Training for "How to be an exciting foreign language conversation partner!"

Please email Chihaya ([chiha143\(at-mark\)nufs.ac.jp](mailto:chiha143(at-mark)nufs.ac.jp)) to participate in this workshop.