Action research in Chinese classroom – an initiative

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What is research?
What is **action** research?
What is action research?

“Action research is a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understandings of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out...”

Kemmis & McTaggart (1988:5)

“Action Research is a democratic and participative orientation of knowledge production. It brings together action and reflection, theory and practice, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern. Action research is a pragmatic creation of knowledge with, not on, about, people.”

Key features of action research

- External expert
- Active, relational participation
- Improvement in practices & settings
Problems/challenges

Challenges:
- Timetable for Mandarin
- Manipulate language (limited use)
- Tech. distractions
- Beh. management
- Differentiation
- Grouping/sets? how?
- Motivation
- Unfossilisation, engaging
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jun Da’s problems</th>
<th>Her questions</th>
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<tr>
<td>A teacher of Mandarin Chinese for adult learners at SOAS</td>
<td>• How do I react when students give me the wrong answers?</td>
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<td>Negative feeling about the oral tests she used in class</td>
<td>• When I intend to help students, do I in fact help them?</td>
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<td>• What do my students think of my way of conducting an oral test? What are their preferences?</td>
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Jun Da’s actions:

- She kept a *diary* to explore her feelings of uneasiness.
- She *recorded* a number of oral tests.
- She gave students a *questionnaire* to investigate their preferences and difficulties in oral tests.
- She asked *students* for *written feedback* after the test.

Jun Da’s self-observation:

- Too many questions at the same time
- Frequent interruptions
- Feedback: "No, I actually wanted you to tell me ..." (不，我是想问你——)
I don't like being interrupted all the time without having the possibility of carrying forward what I want to say.

Being passive. When the teacher talks too much.

The questions "in bursts", without being given the time to answer.
Give students the questions for the oral test five minutes before answering.

Restrict her interventions to a minimum.

When interviewing, paraphrase what students say to help them keep the thread of their thoughts, search their memory or trigger off new ideas.
Students’ comments

I appreciate the fact that you didn’t interrupt me while I was talking and that you tried to help when I had difficulties, and the fact that you were listening attentively to what I was saying, while encouraging me to go on. (Donna)

I felt helped when the teacher repeated what I had said. This helped me reformulate my thoughts more clearly. (Andy)

What I liked in the oral test was the fact that you didn't interrupt me while I was speaking. (Cath)
Action research: processes

Cycle 1
- Observe
- Reflect
- Action

Cycle 2
- Observe
- Reflect
- Action

Plan
Revised Plan
Teacher vs Teacher Researcher

Teacher

- Asks questions about teaching and learning
- Collects information about students
- Often feels overwhelmed or isolated

Teacher Researcher

- Asks intentional questions about teaching and learning
- Focuses on a specific area of inquiry and engages in reflection
- Benefits from ongoing collaboration and support of critical friends
Action research?

Nah, it’s too difficult.

It’s only for clever people.

It’s for the academics.

I’ve got so much marking to do

I haven’t got time.
Action research?

Difficult? Think again...

I know best!

The timescale is entirely up to me, woo hoo!
Jane’s action research

Plan
Chinese characters, pinyin or image first?

Action
Intervention
Self-efficacy tests

Observe
Before & after

Reflect
Orthographic awareness

Revise plan

(Me, 2017)
Action research case study

Grouping arrangement for less able students

Plan
Same ability
High & low ability
Teacher & student

Action
Audio recording

Revise plan

Reflect
More confidence in grouping arrangement

Observe
NO teacher
YES same ability

(Richards & Lockhart, 1994)
Ethical issues in action research

Keep people informed
→ purpose, benefits, rationale

Seek permission
→ Head of department / Head teacher / parents?

Confidential and sensitive issues
→ identity, voluntary participation, right of withdrawal
Confident or Not Confident?
Group activity
Question/problem
What challenges do you face? What would you like to find out? What results would you like to see?

Plan
What has been found out already? (e.g. Journal articles, books, other teachers) How would you carry out your research? (e.g. interventions/changes that you will apply)

Plan
Chinese characters, pinyin or image first?

Action
Collecting your evidence. (e.g. Questionnaires/interviews/testing before- & post-tests/existing data)

Action
Intervention Self-efficacy tests

Observe
How would you analyse data. What does it all mean?

Observe
Before & after

Reflect
How would the evidence inform my future practice? What changes would I make?

Reflect
Orthographic awareness

*Sharing – why & where?

*Ethical issues – who, what & how should you inform?
**Question/problem**
What challenges do you face? What would you like to find out? What results would you like to see?

*Ethical issues – who, what & how should you inform?*

**Plan**
What has been found out already? (eg. Journal articles, books, other teachers)
How would you carry out your research? (eg. interventions/changes that you will apply)

**Action**
Collecting your evidence. (eg. Questionnaires/interviews/testing (pre- & post-tests)/existing data)

**Observe**
How would you analyse data. What does it all mean?

**Reflect**
How would the evidence inform my future practice? What changes would I make?

*Sharing – why & where?*
Great Job!
Useful websites / organisations

❖ IOE Confucius Institute research
   https://ciforschools.wordpress.com/research/

❖ Chartered College for Teaching
   https://www.collegeofteaching.ac.uk/

❖ Taylor and Francis educational action research
   http://tandfonline.com/toc/reac20/current

❖ Association for Language Learning (ALL) research
   https://www.all-languages.org.uk/languages-today/the-big-idea-action-research/

❖ Colleges/universities affiliated to your school
Reading list


“If ‘what works’ doesn’t always work, how do we make good choices?”
(CCT, 2017:8)

“The role of school-based research is clear; it gives schools the chance to better understand the specific needs and characteristics of their own setting”
(CCT, 2017:21)
References


Image credit

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