Classroom-Based Action Research

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Why do it?

1. To reflect more deeply and systematically on teaching practices.

2. In evaluating the effect of actions and practices, to seek opportunities to improve teaching.
1. Identification of problem area
2. Collection and organization of data
3. Interpretation of data
4. Action based on data
5. Reflection

Figure 2. Action Research Cycle
Today’s presentation is framed in terms of my experiences with previous projects:

- Several UCSB–Germany Intercultural Exchanges (ICE) based on Cultura
- Chinese 332 project w/ Stephen & David focusing on interaction online, cohesion, community building
AR: 1. Identify the Problem

- We wanted students to compare word association responses from each side and reflect on cultural differences.
- The Chin 332 students had negotiation tasks, e.g., what kind of cuisine the group liked.
AR: 2. Gather Data

- We collected and saved all online data: word associations, sentence completions, forum data and one-to-one email exchanges
- All the Chinese 332 forum data was stored and saved
Close analysis showed that our German students missed a lot of subtle differences.

We started with quantitative data in the Chin 332 forums to identify “hotspots” of interaction, negotiation, cohesion, community.
Based on the first ICE project, we realized that follow-up in the classroom was essential, so we implemented that in the 2nd ICE.

Based on the quantitative Chinese data, we moved to qualitative analysis for more fine-grained evidence.
In the 2\textsuperscript{nd} round new “problems” arose, e.g., there was a mismatch between what was said in the forums vs. class discussions.

We identified elements that contributed to cohesion and community building.
AR: 6. Next Steps

- Recommendations for future projects
  - Learn from both the positive and negative results
  - Keep an open mind to see what questions might be generated from the data themselves
Any questions so far?
1. Identification of problem area
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**Figure 2. Action Research Cycle**
1. Identify the Problem

- What are some of the specific learning outcomes you are most interested in?
- How do you think that the online learning communities (OLC) will help achieve these outcomes?
Basic Questions

1. **What** would you like your students to learn from the OLCs?
2. **What kinds of evidence** would you like to find to show that they have learned it?
3. **How** can you find or obtain this kind of evidence?
Start with Your Goals

- What are the 3–4 most important things you want your students to learn from this exchange?
- Take a moment to write them down.
- How will you define success?
Sample Goals/Needs

- **Affective**: Community building
- **Linguistic**: Vocabulary; grammar; cohesion in the discourse
- **Pragmatic**: Communicative competence
- **Cultural**: Awareness, insights
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Figure 2. Action Research Cycle
2. Gather Data

- Collect as much demographic data as possible:
  - Age
  - Gender
  - First language (L1)
  - L2 exposure
  - Extent of language use (L1 and L2)
  - Contexts of language use (family, school, work)
Gather Data (2)

- Note all of the *other variables* that could affect learning outcomes (level, prior knowledge, motivation, time on task, etc.).
- It is better to have more data than you think you need (so *save everything!*).
Examples of Qualitative Data

- **Teacher journals**: record successes as well as frustrations (e.g., use the facilitator forums as data)
- **Questionnaires**: e.g., ask students what they thought they learned, whether it was easy to communicate with their partners
Quantitative Data Analysis

- Quantitative analysis of actual language data produced by the students, e.g., in the forums
- Measuring learning outcomes: linguistic progress, pragmatic competence, intercultural competence
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Figure 2. Action Research Cycle
3. Interpret Data

- Combine qualitative + quantitative analyses: Study learning outcomes in addition to students’ perceptions about what they thought they learned or their attitudes towards the OLCs.
Linguistic Improvement

- Expanded vocabulary
- Grammar practice
- Additional chances to use the L2
- Language variation
- Authentic language in the real world, beyond the textbooks
Intercultural Understanding 1

- How others think
- How others act/behave in social contexts
- How things work in daily life in the other’s culture
- Openness, awareness, curiosity about other culture
Intercultural Understanding 2

- Examine cultural assumptions about the other culture
- Local adaptation of the other culture
- Reflect on your own culture
- Grapple with identity issues
Look at forums to see whether:
- Students address each other
- Students address the teacher
- Students respond to others’ postings (cohesion)
- Students use **different types of speech acts** (state opinions, inquire, apologize, request clarification, discuss, speculate, hypothesize)
What to look for/observe 2

- Look at forums to see if/whether:
  - Students only state their opinions
  - Students only talk about L2 and C2
  - Students reflect on their L1 and C1
  - Students express awareness of similarities and differences between C1 and C2
  - How students express understanding of C2
Look at data to see *how*
- Students’ attitudes, perceptions, interactions *have changed* over the course of the exchange (this is not always easy)
- Students *interact* with each other
- *New knowledge* is co-constructed and what it looks like
Any questions here?
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Figure 2. Action Research Cycle
4. Act on Evidence

- During the project, by keeping good records, including recording communication between both sides, you can identify what works and what does not.
- You can then change/improve your strategies.
4. How to Act on Evidence

- Experiment with sequencing
- Experiment with prompts and instructions
- Compare online vs. offline tasks
- Compare use of different media
- Compare use of different online tools
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Figure 2. Action Research Cycle
5. Evaluate Results (Media)

- Is the use of each medium effective for your goals?
  - Text
  - Graphics
  - Video
  - Audio
5. Evaluate Results (Tools)

- Is the use of the **technological tools** effective for your goals?
  - BRIX activities
  - Forums
  - Wikis
  - Skype, videoconferencing
5. Evaluate Results (Teachers)

- Which types of teacher behavior are successful?
- **Where** (in which activities), **when** (at what point in the activity), **how often** (whenever there is a “lull”?) should teachers participate?
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Figure 2. Action Research Cycle
Based on the results of the learning outcomes, the learner behavior, the teacher behavior, what specific things can be changed?

Remember that if you change too many things, you will not be able to ascertain what causes new outcomes.
Action research can be done in the classroom and with the online learning communities.

You do *not* have to do a rigorous experiment with treatment groups (and statistical analyses).

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**Summary & Conclusions 1**
You *do* need to identify a “problem” and have some specific questions or targeted outcomes.

You *do* want to try and control for as many other contributing variables as possible (or at least acknowledge them and keep good notes).
Action Research as a research methodology leads first to reflecting on a pedagogical situation and then to producing change in it.

Language Learning & Technology journal has a new AR column!
The End – all pau

- Have fun with your projects!
- *Mahalo nui loa*