# All beginnings are difficult, but each beginning is filled with a magic....: From topic to research question

Metaphor: Picture of a block of granite before the sculpture takes shape. From raw material to a work of art....

## Table of contents

## Introduction

How can I start my action research project (ARP)? What are the characteristic starting points for an ARP? How can I find a starting point and how can I formulate my thoughts? What are the criteria for choosing a research question? How can I clarify the starting point? What is a good research question? Which concrete instruments are available to help me get started? The aim of the collection of instruments to get started with AR is to find an answer to these questions.

It is about accompanying and supporting teachers to enter into the action research process and, beyond this, to give impulses and to pave the way. This introductory text fulfils several functions. It provides characteristic features and sources of possible starting points (section 1), to feasible orientation of the questions (section 2) and an overview of the first steps as the different instruments (section 3). These are described in detail in the appendix.

## 1- What can I develop and research?

As a language teacher you will most likely have experienced one of the following situations. You have thought hard about finding and introducing a method to encourage your learners to speak in the language classroom. Instead of carrying out the dialogues as suggested, your students write down the dialogues word for word and the "spontaneous" speaking situation is transformed into a tedious writing task. Or maybe you are convinced of the benefits of co-operative forms of learning, but have observed that your learners do not really work together or take advantage of the setting to chat. Or perhaps you ask yourself why your learners do not use the vocabulary list you had intended as a support or why they see this a form of pressure. Such experiences are discrepancy experiences. In the first case the discrepancy is between the planning, your expectations and the reality in the classroom; in the second case the discrepancy

is between an idea of values or an aim and the situation; and in the third case between the way in which several people see the same situation (teachers, students).

Naturally, there are challenges which teachers face at school every day. Certain topics in the curriculum are complex and difficult to teach, students are difficult to motivate, there are problems with a class or a particular learner. Or there is a puzzle that you would like to solve, there are surprises that you would like to understand. Or you are interested in a particular issue: you would like to experiment with a new method for reading comprehension, enhancing the way you organise group work or testing new materials.

All these situations, "discrepancy experiences", difficulties, puzzles, surprises and interests may constitute possible starting points for an ARP (cf. Altrichter und Posch: 52-53).

## 2- Which direction?

Some of the examples described above already contain a more systematic orientation of an AR-question:
• *Goal orientation*: Taking a more global reflection on your role as a teacher you might question aims in your language classroom thus reaching a new focus in L2 teaching and drawing practical consequences.
• *Innovation orientation*: You have decided to experiment with forms of teaching that are new for you, to implement new ideas.
• *Method orientation*: You want to question your teaching methods in general or question the way in which you introduce a new, complex theme and look for new approaches to make the content more interesting.
• *Time orientation*: You are always rushing to finish what you had set out to do in your lessons and would like to develop and trial new forms of time management.
• *Material orientation*: You are not happy with the textbook or parts of the book or find it difficult to deal with the parts of the book. You would like to discover more profitable ways to exploit the work.
• *Media orientation*: You would like to update your approaches to using media in the classroom (films, internet, apps....) and learn how to exploit these in a critical way in the classroom.
• *Learner orientation:* You are looking for ways of motivating a class or individual learners involving them in class activities in a more efficient way and to support their Speaking, Reading, Writing.
• *Collegial orientation*: You would like to work more intensively in a tandem or in subject groups and to develop questions of professional development together. You have posed the question about the impact such co-operation can have on your own development.
 (c.f. Hermes, 2001: 63)

# Bibliography

*Freely accessible texts*

Altrichter, H. & Posch, P. (1998). *Lehrer erforschen ihren Unterricht. Eine Einführung in die Methoden der Aktionsforschung.* Bad Heilbrunn: Klinkhardt.

Altrichter, H. & Posch, P. Teacher investigate their work Online: http://www.cad.unam.mx/programas/actuales/maestrias/maestria_form_cn_ec_SEIEM_2011/00/02_material/02_toluca/mod1/archivos/20_Teachers_investigate_their_work.pdf

Disharoon, R. A. ACTION RESEARCH TOOLKIT ARTS EDUCATION Arts Education in Maryland Schools Alliance Online: http://www.aems-edu.org/PDFs/Action_Research_Toolkit.pdf

Klaus-Börge Boeckmann, K.-B., Feigl-Bogenreiter, E. & Reininger-Stressler, D. (Hrsg.) (2010). Forschendes Lehren. Aktionsforschung im Fremdsprachenunterricht. Online: http://files.adulteducation.at/uploads/brigitte_e/Forschendes_Lehren.pdf

Maggie Coats, M. (2005). Action Research. A Guide for Associate Lecturers, COBE. Online: http://www.open.ac.uk/cobe/docs/AR-Guide-final.pdf

Hermes, L. (2001). Qualitätsentwicklung und Qualitätssicherung von Unterricht in der Sekundarstufe I Englisch. Materialien zu dem Themenbereich Action Research – Lehrkräfte erforschen ihren Unterricht. Herausgegeben vom LANDESINSTITUT FÜR SCHULE UND WEITERBILDUNG Online: http://ltsc.ph-karlsruhe.de/Actionresearch.pdf

McNiff, J. & Whitehead, J. (2010). You and your Action research Project. London: Routledge. Online:

http://www.google.fr/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&ved=0ahUKEwiYzOOCtP_YAhUIWhQKHaj8DosQFggyMAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fvirtualpostgrados.unisabana.edu.co%2Fpluginfile.php%2F432625%2Fmod_folder%2Fcontent%2F0%2FMcNiff%252C%2520Whitehead%2520-%25202010%2520-%2520You%2520and%2520your%2520action%2520research%2520project.pdf%3Fforcedownload%3D1&usg=AOvVaw0RgLSN6F6u1s68-l_Wml0u

Nugent, G., Malik, S. & Hollingsworth, S. (2012). A Practical Guide to ACTION RESEARCH for Literacy Educators With support from the International Reading Association, Nokia Corporation, and Pearson Foundation Contributor/Editor: Amy Pallangyo 2012 Online: http://www.literacyeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/a-practical-guide-to-action-research-for-literacy-.pdf

A Toolkit for Participatory Action Research Online: https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/a_toolkit_for_participatory_action_research.pdf

Thema finden & Forschungsfrage stellen, Schreibzentrum Jena Online:
http://www.schreibenlernen.uni-jena.de/opsismedia/dokumente/Thema+finden+_+Forschungsfrage+stellen.pdf

Von der Idee zur Forschungsfrage Online:
https://www.mahara.at/artefact/file/download.php?file=593547&view=80446

Tagebuchmethode Online: http://methodenpool.uni-koeln.de/download/tagebuchmethode.pdf

Leitfaden zum Forschungstagebuch Online:
http://martinapeitz.ch/pdf/LeitfadenForschungstagebuch.pdf

Inspirationsquelle (aber nicht frei zugänglich):

Schart, M. & Legutke, M. (2012. Lehrkompetenz und Unterrichtsgestaltung München: Klett-Langenscheidt.