

OUTLIERS OF ACTION RESEARCH – THE IDENTITY CONSTRUCT OF FUTURE TEACHERS

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Abstract. *Queries, activities and those sufficient solutions of teaching and learning situations are daily bread of the teaching profession. Thus, in learning of future teachers exist possibilities how to influence the progress of the teachers' identity construction with self-creative and critical tools which are connected to the complexity of the personality. However, action research helps to deeply understand techniques which are behind the line of the traditional point of view and helps to understand the situations from the pragmatic way of natural learning in the process of preparation at the university. The research aim is focused on the support of integration of the action research as a tool for the teachers' preparation in the good practice of the university environment. Mixed research methods are based on the narrative corpus which consists of the coded interviews and specific tasks connected to the educational preparation. Results reflect the current various ways of developing future teachers and their impact on future teachers' identities.*

Keywords: *action research, identity construction, inquiry learning, self-development, teaching approaches.*

Introduction

The classic application of action research comes from a non-pedagogical environment. It is necessary to mention that the initial occurrence was in areas related to corporate and ordinary life, where undesirable phenomena and problems must be addressed efficiently, flexibly and must lead to the results. The research aim is focused on the support of integration of the action research as a tool for the teachers' preparation in the good practice of the university environment. The concept of approaching action research in current conditions is still based on the pillars of Lewin's ideology (Lewin, 1946) and his vision of improving the process and the benefits of effective results. Action research in the concept of education finds an indefinite place. On the one hand, it is cursed by ones and on the other hand adored by others (Friedman & Rogers, 2009; Corey, 1954; Herr & Anderson, 2006). This ambivalence is amplified by the uncertainty and inconsistency of the consensus in the academic sphere, to categorize the action research and how to

approach it from the point of view of science because it does not meet the traditional conservative academic demands (Kerlinger, 1972) for grounding in the methodological hierarchy of science. Mixed research methods are based on the narrative corpus which consists of the coded interviews and specific tasks connected to the educational preparation.

Action research and the current situation at education institutions

In many ways, action research is still a very narrow part of the teacher training content in the profiled teaching base at the Czech universities. The teacher meets after successful graduation with factual reality in the form of everyday challenges and questions that the educational environment offers. In the preparation of a future teacher, we see the importance of connecting the theoretical components that shape his / her personality, contribute to his / her professional and personal growth. In spite of the benefits that action research brings through direct inquiry topology continued, it is in many respects less popular throughout the academic sphere, and its application to the preparation of future teachers is rather rare. The categorical classification of this type of subject is still confronted with misunderstanding in interdisciplinary areas of academic preparation. This is mainly due to its atypical way of proving the theoretical knowledge at the expense of practical experience of events and self-development because there is no unified instrument to measure and demonstrate this progress. The academic concept and verification of research approaches can be selected in a traditional approach to familiar and well-known methodological approaches. Their typology is intertwined with various variations of quantitative and qualitative designs. However, action research can offer a solution that does not have to reveal these approaches, and last but not least, it is a short-term revelation with absolute effects.

There is no uniform definition of the relationship between what is the meaning of action research in the education field. When comparing more authors, we find interesting contradictions in the relation of application and interpretation of the action research given use. By comparison, authors (Lewin, 1946; Stenhouse, 1975; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006,) select action research as process development, analytical tool, an effective attitude to the situation, and a verifier of progressive change.

The cornerstone of the approach to action research is advocacy (defending one's own view of what is happening) and reflection through the elementary questions queried in an effort to effectively move the situation to a progressive solution.

Thus, action research can be understood as an action on a given situation in relation to a phenomenon that has occurred in real time, also as an inquiry-based

solving of a particular problem and, last but not least, as a complete self-reflexive tool to reveal limitations in places where the individual doubts whether his/her actions lead to progressive changes in what he/she does and what he/she could do better.

Stenhouse (1975) speaks of the significance of action research as an application of tools in ontological conception and testing of reality through interrogation. Action research can also be applied as a way of grasping and linking practical benefits with a theoretical interpretation of what an individual should manage and control in practice.

Action research in the service of good faith

The great potential of action research on a pragmatic scale is discussed by authors (Janík, 2004; Nezvalová, 2003; McNiff & Whitehead 2006). The implementation of the pragmatic approach is implemented to the education system in the Czech Republic with a documented legitimacy around the year 2003. The changes in the use of the action research instrument as a reform super tool with the aim of changing the curricular afflictions (caused by the inefficiency of the policymakers) have plunged into education and teacher training dark times. The improvement has come soon after teachers' pressure, which was made possible by the adoption of a law¹ (MŠMT, 2019) that allowed autonomous intervention at school level. As a result of the implementation of the FEP (*Framework Educational Program*), which categorically defined autonomy according to the type of school, it is possible to focus on the introduction of direct curricular changes in the form of SEP (*School Educational Program*). During their implementation, the schools could be involved and take advantage of the effective tools from action research, as they were absolutely free to deal with problematic integration influencing teachers, pupils and parents. The primary applications of action research were focused on addressing practical educational processes and making teaching, didactic preparation, and teacher professional growth more effective at the local levels of the institution.

In the current situation, there is no diction that action research should be part of the compulsory implementation of SEP. In this connection, universities are voluntary and offer a competitive advantage in the field of education to include this type of vocational training in the preparation of a future teacher. Universities in their own environment can intervene effectively and flexibly only under the circumstances of interpreting the diction of the legislative agreement² (MŠMT, 2019) of a valid accreditation that guarantees the professional preparation of the

¹ Act (2004). No. 561/2004 Collection of Law, on Pre-school, Basic, Secondary, Tertiary Professional and Other Education (the Education Act), as amended.

² Act (1998). No. 111/1998 Collection of Law, on Higher Education Institutions, as amended.

individual in the given institution. It's not a trivial matter. The timely change of policymakers and their curriculum changes can make the future teacher's preparation more effective. We would find a high number of examples of the importance and benefits of action research on self-development. The main advantage of action research is the professional preparation of the teacher outside of the university environment, not only in preparation on faculties of education where it is seen as an elementary and key ability to be consistently prepared for the requirements and needs of the conditions of the 21st century.

By comparing the various interpretations of the cyclical application of action research for better clarity, we summed up these gently different attitudes from the authors to the table.

Table 1 Uroboros of action research cycle phases

	<i>McNiff & Whitehead (2006: 91)</i>	<i>Nezvalová (2003)</i>	<i>Chudý & Kropáč (2019)</i>
Cycle n.1	I experience a concern when some of my educational values are denied in my practice.	Problem formulation	Situation imagination
Cycle n.2	I imagine a solution to the concern.	Data collecting	Empathy to situation
Cycle n.3	I act in the direction of the imagined solution.	Data evaluation	Reactive solution
Cycle n.4	I evaluate the outcome of the solution.	Result presentation	Application of the procedure in practice
Cycle n.5	I modify my practice, plans and ideas in light of the evaluation.	Action plan	Continuous escalation of the solution in practice

Below is a selection of McNiff & Whitehead (2006: 8-9) fictitious partial steps approach:

Action research aims to be a disciplined, systematic process. A notional action plan is:

- take stock of what is going on,
- identify a concern,
- think of a possible way forward,
- try it out,
- monitor the action by gathering data to show what is happening,
- evaluate progress by establishing procedures for making judgements about
- what is happening,
- test the validity of accounts of learning,

- modify practice in the light of the evaluation.

Methodological part

We draw from our own proven conceptual framework to demonstrate the effectiveness and contribution of action research on the influence of the formation of the future teacher's identity, which is verified in the sequence of the individual steps. The mixed methodology is based on the concepts of the Creswell (2009) narrative approach, which was modified and applied to our research needs in the context of action research and elaborated on a partial and more precise element - the narrative corpus (interrogation of the author), which was supported by interview, text analysis, categorical selection of the coded variables and their count, and, last but not least, the evaluation and self-reflexive essays. Postproduction of data was evaluated by a phenomenological concept based on a subjective and effective conception of approaches to the specifics of the students' work, as well as by objective assessment within the group discussion and acceptance of consensus for social satisfaction. The content analysis of data was carried out through modern transcriptions converted to statistical variables using analytical methodological programs (Nvivo with own code matrix), which were able to define the statistical variable – count.

We focused on 103 respondents aged 20-23 were involved in our research, represented by 55% of women, 45% by men. It was a deliberately chosen sample of future teachers who are continually preparing for the profession of a teacher in an accredited university environment.

The actual action research application process consisted of long-term research based on the mix of individual approaches that were gradually escalated to develop the personality and professional identity of the individual and his / her practical skills, using the phased application of the methods and forms that action research brings.

Findings

The composition of the framework matrix based on the partial steps corresponded to the continuous steps leading to the development of the student's knowledge in the field of action research and the current demands on levels of critical thinking, abstraction, application, communication, emotional maturity and professional ethos.

1. First Phase (Stage) Ex-Ante Reflection of Knowledge (Teachers oriented fiction)

This part brings findings mainly in the field of perceptions of teachers' conflict in the pedagogical part, which the student is experiencing in the preparation (Chudý, Balaban, Koribská, & Kropáč, 2018; Kropáč & Peng, 2018).

Simulation of pre-teacher fiction abstraction situation reflects what student expects in the future role of the teacher.

Contribution to teaching v. long-term benefit for the student in the direction of awareness of his / her own barriers and deficiencies. The student thinks over the solutions based on his / her current concepts on the topic of the problem and is able to evaluate the situation in order to integrate his / her own teaching approach to the solution of the whole issue. Purely naturalistic self-development is improved effectively in a short time horizon. The scope of the solution was determined by 250 words for a more perceptive imagination of the perceived problem of self-reflection.

The initial level of the applied method in terms of action research was based on the explanation of a fictitious example, in which the student expressed his / her own opinion through his / her own experience by questioning the given phenomenon, and he/she elaborated this opinion into a short reflection that was analysed and evaluated over the next hours. From this stage, each student immediately had his / her own preconceptual overview of the knowledge gained on the subject of action research and could improve the potential failures.

2. Second Phase (Stage) - Please, do it better in the fictional service conditions

The following phase has been cooperatively focused on the development of didactic, communication, and crisis areas with which an individual can meet at school and professional level. Students were selectively defined in working groups, and each group was assigned an identity that supervised the development of the situation based on continuous questioning about the thematic issue. It is a case study that students have the task of solving together in a short period of time and then reflecting and defending their vision at the expense of other groups that compete with each other and try to bring the most effective way out of the whole situation that would help the whole thing, so that the benefits of school-level action meet the expectations effectively, quickly and positively. The outcome was the concept of rules that the individual groups retained in the future and subsequently followed up in the development of the situational solution and completed their findings in the project worksheets.

Students were divided into groups according to different approvals. The optimized group size ranges from 12-15 people. In the first phase of the project approach to action research, representatives were selected in each group, who represented the role of the head of institution, representative and educational

counsellor (*Autonomous Administrator of the Institution*) the rest of the participants from the group were active teachers (*their roles*). The purpose was to create a pact of solution procedures so that they could best capture their natural view of the situation. There were no wrong ideas. Since they were students who have a different degree of knowledge and experience from practice and industry, it was necessary to let the students think about the situation and lead them from a mentor position. Individuals representing the institutional component were invited to present the results at the end of the exercise. The theme of cooperative group work brought results within 45 minutes even with frontal evaluation of variance assignment. In our case, the students dealt with the situation of problematic integration of the pupil with dysfunction and complicated life situation in the family, which profoundly and socially influenced its working at the school. This case originated from a real casuistic situation that was verified in practice and had a template for the right solution by external supervision of pedagogical-psychological institutions that provided expert consultation in the individual procedures of the solution.

E.g. Assignment Group Learning – Action Research Component Project (worksheets from students - narrative transcript).

- *Group A Student 1.*
[...] *You are not right in your inquiry in relation to the situation. Imagine that you are a child but you must solve it from the teachers' perception.*
- *Group B Student 2. (in the role position)*
[...] *Well, I understand what you feel to this child but we are school workers with expectations from supervising institutions. You must push yourself to the uncomfortable zone. If not you will suffer in practice later.*
- *Mentor and student's council*
[...] *Please, both of you are right. There are no bad or good questions. You did or you will have to do what is sometimes unpredictable and unfair or uncomfortable to each of the partial members of the educational environment as teachers (your colleagues), students (your pupils) and parents or supervising institutions which influence quality. You will have to find the same speech and effective way of the output. You are teachers.*

Students get deeper into the gradation of the solution to the phenomenon and work consistently in upcoming meetings and elaborate on their own strategic educational approaches based on group work. Their evaluation is done in real time from the point of view of the supervisor, the mentor and the respondents' own point of view.

3. Third Phase (Stage) – Conceptual evaluating of the role of narration essay and application of the action research rules on student's professional development.

At the end of our work students reflected and defended themselves through a written work on the topic of the reasons for choosing a teaching profession. The

essay has been critically defined to include history, complete awareness of current preparations and its risks, own failures, and, last but not least, the imagination of the future. This methodology has provided students with answers to their own questions about their own concepts of teacher's profession, their own identity, their own expectations, deficiencies, threats and challenges that can be met in pedagogical practice.

Table 2 *Results of the outliers in the framework usage*

Problematic field	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
Expectations	121	5,81
Future improvement	124	5,95
Lack of practice	351	16,84
Professional development	109	5,23
Self -inquiry	343	16,46
Shall I do it better?	195	9,36
Sharing knowledge	70	3,36
Work impact	771	37,00

n=2084

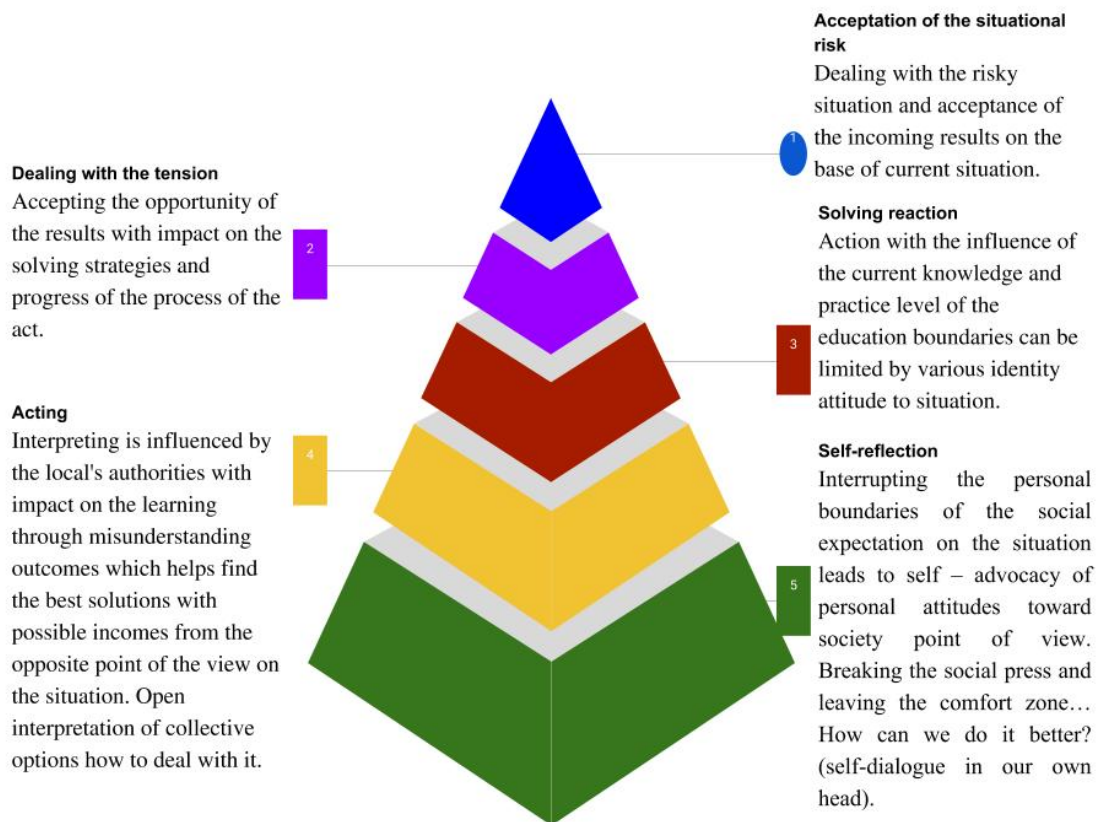


Figure 1 *Action research inquiring framework*

In the contextual interpretation of table above, we see the relation of action research in a broad spectrum, which can be defined as:

- The imagination of the situation influencing the challenges and concerns in teacher training,
- Empathy and perceiving of the situation as a part of common behaviour,
- Reactive solution based on continual improvement and inquiry,
- Application of the practice in the purpose of the natural development of the student,
- Continuous escalation of the solution in practice in preparing the future teacher and influencing his / her identical and professional component.

Conclusion

Action research brings analytical and beneficial findings of our developmental and professional knowledge in a short time horizon. In spite of the various contempt for this approach in the academic environment (Norton, 2009), we see the predominantly enriching effects of this method, which diversifies the everyday teacher's dogma and stereotype (Fenstermacher & Soltis, 1998; Schön, 1983). However, what is certain, action research does not address the theoretical background in order to create new theoretical findings that have been verified through aged approaches to the research hypothetical knowledge of the daily reality of teacher professionalism. From a teleological point of view, action research can bring more beneficial results in the areas of exploration of identical parts of personality, where compact, measurable, standardized tests may no longer be enough to fill the too conservative gap in the classical approach to research and its limitations in the teaching environment.

Recommendation for the preparation of the future teachers is to implement the action research to the study programme on the universities where students can test and practice their own strategies under the supervisions of the teachers which is helpful and encourages the student's carrier.

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