An Action Research of UG5 Retreat Programs on Enhancing the Noble Eightfold Path

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Abstract

According what the Buddha taught, every Buddhist followers can practice the Buddha's teaching in order to escape all of the sufferings and attain the genuine happiness that is nirvana. However, the way of understanding could be affected by people's background and environment. It is needed to have some ideas suitable for modern life style, and let people without any religious belief also can accept them easily. UG5 is the shortened form of Universal Goodness Five. It is a very new good concept that means the five kinds of universal goodness including cleanliness, orderliness, politeness, punctuality, and concentration. In this research, the concepts of UG5 was used to develop a series of retreat programs, and all of these retreat programs aimed to let the trainees enhance their practice of the Noble Eightfold Path. The objects of this research are to design and act the UG5 retreat programs for enhancing the Noble Eightfold Path practice in daily life.

Keywords: Action research; Noble Eightfold Path; UG5 retreat programs

Introduction

The teachings of the Lord Buddha are not people to escape from life, but to help people relate to themselves and the world as thoroughly as possible. The core teachings of Lord Buddha are the Four Noble Truths, especially the fourth Noble Truth which is the path leading us to refraining from doing those things that cause us suffering. According what the Buddha taught, every Buddhist followers can practice the Buddha's teaching in order to escape all of the sufferings and attain the genuine happiness that is nirvana. However, the way of understanding could be affected by people's background and environment. The way of practicing is also depend on the culture and life-style in society. More than two thousand and five hundred years are passing away. How can people understand the Noble Eightfold Path and practice it properly in daily lives today? It is needed to have some ideas and methods suitable for modern life style, and to let people who even without any religious belief also can accept these ideas and methods easily. UG5 is the shortened form of Universal Goodness Five. It is a very new good concept that means the five kinds of universal goodness including cleanliness, orderliness, politeness, punctuality, and concentration. In order to let modern people can accept, understand and practice Buddha's teaching in their daily life more easily, the concepts of UG5 will be used to develop a series of retreat programs, and all of these retreat programs aim to let the trainees enhance their practice of the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Action Research

This research is an action research. The process of action research includes planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. In this research, the independent variables of this research are the UG5 retreat programs, and the dependent variables here are the practice of Noble Eightfold Path in daily life. Before doing the action research in real, the pre-study of the Noble Eightfold Path and UG 5 should be done in order to design the retreat programs more deeply and suitably.

Action research is a method of research combining both action and research, therefore action research is a "learning by doing" progress. The action research aims to reduce the gap between theory and practice, and to make trainers no longer think that the theory is one thing, but the actually situation is another. Moreover, action research is cyclical that means the process doesn't necessarily have to stop at any particular point. The action research process lends itself to a spiral of cycles, with the researcher reflecting on each stage of the process. In this research, the action research are in two cycles which are put into practice at the end of 2017 and 2018.

The Noble Eightfold Path

The Noble Eightfold Path is constituted with the Right View (Sammādiṭṭhi), Right Though (Sammāsaṅkappa), Right Speech (Sammāvācā), Right Action (Sammākammanta), Right Livelihood (Sammā-ājīva), Right Effort (Sammāvāyāma), Right Mindfulness (Sammāsati), and Right Concentration (Sammāsamādhi). The contents of the Noble Eightfold Path are explained as following.

Right view is the right and correct understanding of the reality of physical and mental phenomena that removes the basic unwholesome factor of ignorance. Right View has been placed at the top of the Noble Eightfold Path not only because it is essential to have a certain degree of correct understanding before one enters the path of liberation but also because the right understanding needs to be continually present in order to proceed with the other seven factors of the path through moral discipline, concentration and wisdom.¹

Right Thought is the right intention or right thinking that naturally evolves as a result of Right View and together they form the stage of the Eightfold Path called wisdom. Right Thought is necessary for the development of the next stage of the path, namely the moral discipline consisting of Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood.²

Right Speech is guided by the first two factors of Right View and Right Intention. There are four aspects of Right Speech that are abstinence from false speech or telling lies; abstinence from malicious, backbiting, divisive or slanderous speech; abstinence from harsh, blameful or hurtful speech; abstinence from gossip, vain talk or idle chatter.

Right Action means right action of the body. It is the practice of touching love and preventing harm, the practice of nonviolence toward ourselves and others. The basis of Right Action is to do everything in mindfulness.³ Right Action, by the avoidance of unwholesome physical or bodily actions, will result in an ethical life and will lead to peace and harmony between oneself and others. There are three aspects to Right Action that are abstinence from killing any living beings, abstinence from stealing, and abstinence from sexual misconduct.

Right Livelihood expects one to make one's living by ethical, legal and honest means following certain ethical standards and causing no harm or suffering to other living

¹Mahāsī Sayādaw. (1998). Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta, p. 122.

²Hanh, Thich Nhat. (2015). The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching. Kindle Edition, location: 968-972.

³*ibid.*, 1438-1439.

beings directly or indirectly.⁴ There are five types of trades that are to be avoided by a layperson in order to maintain a Right Livelihood that are trading in living beings including human beings and animals, trading in arms and weapons, trading in intoxicants including alcohol and illicit drugs, trading in poisons, and trading in meat.⁵

Right Effort is the other two factors being Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. Right Effort is the kind of energy that helps us realize the Noble Eightfold Path and provides the necessary energy to develop all the other seven factors of the path but, in particular, it provides the energy to develop the right mental concentration necessary to develop right wisdom.⁶

Right Mindfulness is to be developed through the four foundations of mindfulness that are the contemplation of the body, feelings, the mind, and the mind objects. It can be seen as the heart of the Buddha's teachings. As the taught by the Lord Buddha in the Satipatthana Sutta, Right Mindfulness is to be developed through the four foundations of mindfulness that are the contemplation of the body, feelings, the mind, and the mind objects. The Four Establishments of Mindfulness are the foundation of the dwelling place. Without them, the house is abandoned; no one is sweeping, dusting, or tidying up. The body becomes unkempt, the feelings full of suffering, and the mind a heap of afflictions. When people are truly home, their body, mind, and feelings will be a place of refuge for themselves and others. The first establishment is mindfulness of the body in the body. The second establishment is mindfulness of the mind in the mind. The fourth establishment is mindfulness of phenomena in phenomena.

Right Concentration is the eighth and final factor of the Noble Eightfold Path. The first seven factors of the path, from Right View to Right Mindfulness, when developed successfully become supportive and requisite conditions for the development of Right Concentration. In Buddhist teaching, forty meditation objects have been described as suitable objects for developing concentration of which any could be chosen, depending on one's temperament, and preferably with the support of a meditation teacher. The forty meditation objects are: ten kasiṇas (earth, water, fire, air-wind, blue-green color, yellow color, red color, white color, light, and space), ten types of foulness (ten stages in the decomposition of a corpse), ten contemplations (contemplation on Buddha, Dharma, Sangha,

⁴*ibid.*, 896-899.

⁵*ibid.*, 896-899.

⁶ibid., 897-899.

⁷ibid., 1044-1046.

morality, generosity, heavenly beings, death, body, in breath and out breath, and peace), the four sublime states or divine abodes (loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity), four immaterial spheres (sphere of boundless space, sphere of boundless consciousness, sphere of nothingness and sphere of neither perception nor non-perception), perception of the loathsomeness of food, analysis of the four elements (earth element, water element, fire element and air element).⁸

The eight factors of the Noble Eightfold Path have traditionally been presented in the order in which they are discussed above, beginning with Right View and ending with Right Concentration. However, they are not expected to be developed in an orderly step-by-step manner as they can be present together in any given stage of the path supporting each other. Some factors can be more prominent than others at any particular stage. They can be developed simultaneously at a pace dependent on the capacity of each individual. From a practical point of view, it is advisable for one's spiritual development that one begins with the factor of morality followed by the factors of concentration and wisdom in that order.

The eight practices of the Noble Eightfold Path nourish each other. As people's view becomes more "right," the other elements of the Eightfold Path in us also deepen. Right Speech is based on Right View, and it also nourishes Right View. Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration strengthen and deepen Right View. Right Action has to be based on Right View. Right Livelihood clarifies Right View. Right View is both a cause and an effect of all the other elements of the path.

The UG 5 (Universal Goodness Five)

According what the Buddha taught, every Buddhist followers can practice the Buddha's teaching in order to escape all of the sufferings and attain the genuine happiness that is nirvana. The way of practicing is also depend on the culture and lifestyle in society. However, more than two thousand and five hundred years are passing away. It is needed to have some ideas and methods suitable for modern life style, and to let people who even without any religious belief also can accept these ideas and methods easily. UG5 is the shortened form of Universal Goodness Five. It is a very new good concept that means the five kinds of universal goodness including cleanliness, orderliness, politeness, punctuality, and concentration. Bhikkhu Dattajeevo, the vice abbot of Dhammakaya Temple, proposed

 $^{^8}$ Nānamoli, Bhikkhu. (2010). The Path of Purigication (Visuddhimagga), pp. 113-121.

this idea from the concepts of Five Precepts in Buddhism and also committed to promoting such training activities. In these years, there are many fruitful results in schools and family. For example, there are many schools in Cambodia using the UG5 to train the students and get very amazing results as well such as the Bodhi primary school and so on.⁹

Five Precepts are too related with the religion and are not easily to understand and accept for non-Buddhist. The five kinds of universal goodness including cleanliness, orderliness, politeness, punctuality, and concentration are not in conflict with any religious and moral values, not in conflict with any country's rule of law, not in conflict with any country's government policies, not in conflict with a person's rights and liberties. Besides, UG5 does not undermine a person's health, and is the basic goodness which can be cultivated by anyone. It should be easier to understand and accept for general people in the world. Therefore, in this research, the concepts of UG5 will be used to develop a series of retreat programs in order to enhance the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path. The content of UG5 is explained as following.

Cleanliness: Human beings are the sources of dirtiness on earth. All of our bodies together make our earth dirty. Each one of us is like a walking garbage can, a walking corpse, a prisoner. Feeling hot, cold, hungry, thirsty, having the need to urinate and defecate are the forms of suffering experienced by everyone. They are caused by the fact that the four primary elements which make up our cells are dirty. Therefore, they die at the rate of around three to four hundred million per minute. The food we eat helps our body to generate new cells to replace the old ones. It is the root cause of atrocities is dirtiness. When a person is dirty, his house will also be dirty. Hence, if someone always washes his body thoroughly, clean all washing utensils and equipment well, and the habit of maintaining this routine behavior contributes to his daily life.

Orderliness: Everything needs to be put in its proper place and order from large into small or small into large. In some cases, the "first in, first out" principle needs to be applied. It means doing everything necessary to keep each place orderly and neat whether it is a room, an office, or other places. ¹¹ People should utilize and maintain clothes appropriately, by the habit of removing soil and grime in a timely manner so that the clothes and accessories are readily available and in a well maintained and good condition for reuse.

⁹The result of the Bodhi primary school in Cambodia is showed in the YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=BKGcv3PxhXc

¹⁰Dattajeevo, Bhikkhu. (2015). The Universal Goodness Five, p. 57.

¹¹ ibid., p. 58.

Politeness: Politeness is shown in the way one sits, lies down, stands and walks. One cannot sit, lie down, stand or walk properly. It also means to use the facility and equipment with consideration to others so as not cause any disturbance to those outside of the room or leave any inconvenience or unpleasantness for the next user to encounter. Moreover, polite people always use pleasant and respectful words when interacting with others. Work with mindful attitude of body and speech to prevent conflict and misunderstanding. ¹² The beneficial habit will helps him have more successful life.

Punctuality: Maintain punctuality every day to establish good habits. A clear mind starts with body contemplation so that self-attachment is diluted by awareness of dirtiness and body deterioration. People being unpunctual always caused by the lack of concentration which in turn is caused by the lack of cleanliness. Self-indulgence makes one feel that one can do anything one wants and one could not care less about other people. ¹³ If people can do anything at the right time, he can also control himself better. For example, he will buy things at the right time for the right reasons and seasons, when sold at an economically fair price or as older garments become no longer serviceable or of appropriate appearance.

Concentration: A clear mind allows one to be sensible and prudent in our purchases and not swayed in our judgments as a result of our defilements. A sense of contentment, pride in appearance, confidence and pleasure occur when one is in the habit of being sensible and responsible in the care of their belongings. One must cultivate a clear mind in order to work without succumbing to any of the four Prejudices, which are prejudice caused by love or desire, prejudice caused by hatred or enmity, prejudice caused by dilution or stupidity and prejudice caused by fear. Actually, the home, clothes, food, medicine and everything else that come into contact with become dirty because the body is dirty. Dirtiness leads to the lack of orderliness. The lack of orderliness leads to absent-mindedness which causes impoliteness. Besides, the impoliteness is caused by self-indulgence, laziness, the lack of consideration for others. Impoliteness leads to unpunctuality and unpunctuality leads to the lack of concentration.¹⁴ All of these five goodness are related.

¹²ibid., pp. 58-67.

¹³ibid., pp. 67-68.

¹⁴ibid., pp. 68-70.

The Analysis of Results

There are two series of action research cycles in this research. In the first cycle, the action research of the UG5 retreatment is taken from 11 to 15 in September of 2017. In the second cycle, it is taken from 26 to 29 November of 2018. There are three kinds of questionnaires in both of these two times of retreatment and the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with trainees who should attain the retreatment on time every day and never be absent. The number of participants is nine people in both of these two times. The analysis of results is as following.

Quantitative Analysis of pre-post test

The pre-post questionnaire includes forty questions that there are five questions for each Noble Eightfold Path. According to the result of the retreat programs in the first time in 2017, the average score of the nine trainees before retreat programs is 3.69, and the average score is 4.43 after retreat program. Moreover, the p-value is less than 0.01. It means there is overwhelming evidence to infer that the alternative hypothesis is true. The test is highly significant.

Table 1: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test of retreat programs in 2017

Experiment	Samples	Mean	S. D.	t	P-value
Pre-test	9	3.69	.53	6.734	.000
Post-test	9	4.43	.50		

According to the result the pre-post questionnaire of the retreat programs in the second time in 2018, the average score of the twenty eight trainees before retreat programs is 3.48, and the average score is 4.51 after retreat program. The p-value is less than 0.01as well. It means there is overwhelming evidence to infer that the alternative hypothesis is true. The test is highly significant.

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test of retreat programs in 2018

Experiment	Samples	Mean	S. D.	t	P-value
Pre-test	28	3.48	.34	15.420	.000
Post-test	28	4.51	.32		

Comparing the result of these two years, the samples is added from nine to twenty-eight. The percentage of improvement is from 19.9% to 29.9%. In both of these two times, the difference of the result of pre-test and post-test is significant. The comparison is as following.

Table 3: Comparing the results of pre-test and post-test in 2017 and 2018

Experiment	Samples	Improvement
In 2017 In 2018	9 28	Average score is from 3.69 to 4.43, the improvement is 19.9 %. Average score is from 3.48 to 4.51, the improvement is 29.9 %.

Besides the pre and post-test of questionnaire, there is a questionnaire of satisfaction which including are four parts of questions. The first part is about the satisfaction with this retreatment, the second part is about the helpfulness of every program to the daily life, the third part is about the willing of broadcasting and joining in the retreatment continuous. All of these three parts are close questions and belonging to the quantitative analysis. The fourth part, the last one, of questionnaire is six open-ended questions about the experience to join in this retreatment and belonging to the qualitative analysis.

Qualitative Analysis of interviews

The researcher totally interviewed with eighteen trainees who should attain the retreatment on time every day and never be absent. The questions and the results are as following.

1) Why do you want to join the retreat programs in this time?

The answers can be divided into three kinds of motivation to join in the retreat programs. The first one is the group that they are interested to improve themselves. For example, some people said that she joined the programs in order to gain more knowledge, and whenever she had free time, she would find some courses to attend. The second group is the ones who are following the trend of society.

2) Do you think you have gained what you wanted? What is it?

Most of the interviewed trainees said they had gained what they wanted. Some people even said she felt that what she had learnt was beyond my expectations. Many of them appreciated the courses of calming down that are the meditation courses. Such like some interviewee said: "One must learn how to calm the heart, but I do not know how

to calm the heart, moreover saying and doing are two different thing, the person who say might not know how to do, last time I did not know how to calm the heart, now I know how to calm the heart, this is my greatest gain" and so on.

3) Which program has given you the deepest impression in this time?

There are many kinds of answers in this questions. The trainees were interested in the practice of concentration, living in the moment and so on. Just like some interviewee said: "The deepest impression besides calming the heart, also the watching of the three movies yesterday, until this morning I am still thinking what the locks represent, she is bounded by what kind of lock." Moreover, some of them had good experienced of meditation. They said: "The deepest impression is meditation, normally we do not experience so much during meditation, will be distracted by the past, will flow along with those distraction, even not aware of our own situation, now we will remind ourselves every now and then." Besides, some of them were impressed with the topic of interpersonal relationship and emotion control. Such as some interviewee said: "I was interested in the metaphor of glasses, also looking for the glasses that I am wearing, take out layer by layer, will use when needed."

4) In your opinion, what helps you most in this time?

Most of them felt their mind was more calming down and they felt happier. Some interviewee said that she could control their anger and listen to others much more. She said: "I feel that content that I have learnt can be applied in my daily life, example the folding of clothes, I will start with myself and then affect the rest of the family members, I want to let this become a family habit, let my daughter inherit it."

5) During these programs, which part touches your heart the most?

Most of them answered the time of making wishes in the last program touched them most. Some of them could deeply appreciate their body and their life better. They could themselves much clearly. Some interviewee said: "Normally I do not appreciate the moment, everyday busy but do not know what I am busy with, include eating, do not know the taste of the food when eating, over the days, gradually I have some different experience."

6) Which part is most useful to you in your daily life?

Many people answered the emotional controlling courses makes them feel more powerful. Some interviewee said: "Sometimes I am out of control with my son, but next time I will use this model against him, this bad model is still circulating. After attending the lesson there will be some changes, like yesterday after the meal after clearing up, he let me check and sign his homework, I am more patient with him."

7) Is there any changes in you after joining this retreatment?

Some interviewee said: "Until now, I feel that the greatest changes is I have become more happy and I am willing to show the real me. I used to pretend that I know in fact I do not know because of my self-conceit especially in the presence of my subordinates but now I will admit that I do not know if I do not know." Some interviewee answered: "I am a rigorous person, the first day of confusion and ignorance, the second and third day is more interesting to me, but I will definitely do, so that I will understand. Calming the heart is good, no matter it is the sitting position or walking, from beginning until the end there is a good convergence" and so on.

8) Would you like to attend a similar retreatment again? Why?

Almost all of them answered they would if they had the free time. Some interviewee said: "I feel that the room is neat, and the bed space is also big. Every night before going to bed, I can sit on the bed and read a book, sort out the clothes, and feel good. And when our daughter has nothing to do, she likes to come to my room to chat with me." Some interviewee said: "A new habit requires that when other members of the family cannot fully do it, they must do it themselves and become a little sun. Other members may feel that the light may change" and so on.

Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis of satisfaction

According to the quantitative Analysis of satisfaction questionnaire, there are seven questions in the first part of questionnaire about the environment, course contents, activities design, handout, instructor, staff and totally. From the result, except the environment in 2017, all the scores of these seven questions are more than 4.50 both in 2017 and 2018. The instructor gained the best score in both of these two years. The environment improved most in 2018, it is because of the reflection of the result in 2017.

In the second part of questionnaire, the trainee should answer how the course helpful to their daily life. The courses include the warm up activities, eating meditation, walking meditation, sitting meditation, basic concepts, and interpersonal communication and so on. From the result, the folding practice gained the best score in both of these two years.

The third part of questionnaire is about the willing of broadcasting and joining in the retreatment continuous. From the result, we can see the trainees would like to practice the methods continuously gained the best score in both of these two years.

According to qualitative analysis of satisfaction questionnaire, the fourth part of questionnaire is six open-ended questions about the retreatment experience as following.

1) What is the most appreciated part of this course?

Some people appreciated the trainer and course content, some people appreciated some programs most, such as "live in the moment", "emotion control", or "interpersonal communication" and so on. Most of them mentioned about the combination of theory and practice. They said that the content of courses are very closely related to life. They also appreciated the progress of retreat programs always were adjusted according to the actual situation and the learning situation. Besides, the practice course helped the understanding of related knowledge. They also appreciated the knowledge about the influence of good habits, the cultivation of mind, and emotional control. Someone said: "Calming the mind leads one out of confusion and finds answer and brightness."

2) What is the biggest take away from this course?

After the retreat programs, some of them could accept all aspects of life and make improvements to them, willing to make themselves to be more perfect person, and to influence the people around as well. Such as trying to manage the family better, practice to calm down their mind, try to cultivate better mindset and habits. A lot of them said the biggest benefit was that they had become more confident and have more encourage to walk out from the comfort zone in their daily life.

3) What have you learnt which you will apply to your daily life?

Most of them answered the folding of bags, socks and clothes were very helpful and useful in their daily life. Besides, they knew the way to calm down and control their emotion, especially the anger. Many of them stared to management the five rooms in their home with their children, or husband also.

4) Please give suggestion to improve this program.

Although the environment of retreat programs were improved a lot, some of them also wanted to improve the environment much more, such as the projector, and air-conditioner and so on. Beside, some trainees were late, it was not very good for the progress of retreatment.

5) You are welcome to leave your comments or personal feeling if you find this program brings about growth to your life.

They answered a lot in this question. All of the answers are very touching. Some people said: the course "Allows me to put into practice in my daily life, starting from my personal growth to driving the people around me toward betterment. I have stronger

faith in myself and believe I can do it. Some people said: "A calm mind is relaxing, past unpleasant experiences should be discarded, release oneself, we must have a relieved mind", "Understood the purpose of life, love oneself and others, it's difficult to be born as a human" and so on.

6) Any other opinions which you wish to express?

Some of them asked to have more courses to encourage everybody for a longer journey. Some of them wanted to have the related retreat programs for the young people.

Conclusion

UG5 is a very new good concept that means the five kinds of universal goodness including cleanliness, orderliness, politeness, punctuality, and concentration. From the action research, it is shown the UG5 retreat programs are really helpful to enhance the Eightfold Path in modern daily life.

In action research, the researcher himself is always the partial of tools to work on the research. The good preparing is also important. Although every retreat programs should be prepared in advanced, the researcher also has to prepare the backup materials to meet any situation happened during the progress of retreat programs. Moreover, the interactions between the trainees and the trainer are very important which could affect the feeling of the trainees very much. During the action research, the atmosphere of retreat is very important. It will much affect the result of retreatment. The staff in the action research helps everything during the retreat programs. A good team work can let the researcher focus on his programs more deeply.

In my opinion, the results of this research are quiet well not only the results of quantitative analysis but also the qualitative analysis. In my opinion, there are many reasons to get the good results. The first reason, of course, is due to the profound and powerful teachings of Buddha. UG5 is a very new good concept that means the five kinds of universal goodness including cleanliness, orderliness, politeness, punctuality, and concentration. It is much related with the contents of five precepts that includes the abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and fermented drink that causes heedlessness. Actually, the five precepts are the essential base in practicing the Noble Eightfold Path. Therefore, if somebody can have these five universal goodness much more, he naturally must have the better basis to practice the Noble Eightfold Path much more. Moreover, the Noble Eightfold Path is the essential Dharma of Buddha's forty five years teachings.

To practice the Noble Eightfold Path in real should be helpful for people to eliminating suffering in their daily life. People practice the Noble Eightfold Path in real should be happier and can handle the daily problems more intelligently. The second reason to get the good results could be the simple and pure motion and well prepare. During the retreat programs, the team work of trainers including the trainee myself and the helping staff are simply want to help all of the trainees be happier and getting what they want. Just charge the basic fee of handout and food. No extra charge can let the trainees trust the trainer easier. Besides, the good preparing is very important. Although every retreat programs should be prepared in advanced, the researcher also has to prepare the backup materials to meet any situation happened during the progress of retreat programs. Therefore, I should prepare more than 100%. That means if the during days of retreatment is five days, the researcher should prepare the materials enough to about one week or much more. Therefore, in my opinion, the documentary research which done in advance is very helpful. It will let the researcher know the goals to retreat more detailed, and not to be lost in the direction during the programs. Moreover, in this action research, the trainer is myself only, so I could handle everything and decided to change very quickly and directly. This is the very important special part of action research. The researcher himself is always the partial of tools to work on the research.

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