

How can English teachers develop appropriate methodology? How can they have autonomy?

Richard Smith

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Resources: [warwick.ac.uk/  
richardcsmith/bremen](http://warwick.ac.uk/richardcsmith/bremen)

# Plan

1. Name and explain the questions!
2. Identify the 'topic the questions are embedded in'!
3. Explain why the questions are interesting and important for you!
4. Illustrate whether you have already (partly) found answers to the questions!
5. Show how the question(s) might shape foreign language research!

1. Name and explain the question(s)!

# Two questions that I considered

- How can history help us better understand language teaching? Specifically ...
- How can history help us move beyond mythological, progressivist perspectives in language teaching?

But I didn't choose these. Instead, I delved deeper ...

# Questions that motivate my work at a deeper and broader level

Q1: How can English teachers [in public education systems and in 'difficult circumstances'] develop appropriate methodology?

Q2: How can they have autonomy?

(Historical research and awareness provide *some* answers!]

# Underlying key concepts

A. **Appropriate methodology** – cf. ‘appropriate technology’

B. **‘Difficult circumstances’** = ‘normal circumstances’

C. **Autonomy** – i.e. (in this case) ‘teacher autonomy’, interpreted as ‘teacher-learner autonomy’

# Appropriate methodology

**Cf. Appropriate technology** – a movement (and its manifestations) encompassing technological choice and application that is **small-scale, decentralized, ... environmentally sound, and locally autonomous.**

... originally articulated as '**intermediate technology**' by the economist Dr. Ernst Friedrich "Fritz" Schumacher in his work *Small is Beautiful*.

... Schumacher and many modern-day proponents also emphasize the technology as **people-centered.**

# Appropriate methodology

Adrian Holliday (1994) *Appropriate Methodology and Social Context*

Cf. also work by Pennycook, Phillipson, Canagarajah in the 1990s ('critical turn' in ELT)

Inappropriateness of top-down / centre-periphery solutions →

Generally acknowledged needs for context-sensitive approaches









Photo © Christopher Tribble, 2004







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# ‘Difficult circumstances’

Michael West’s (1960) *Teaching English in Difficult Circumstances*

“a class consisting of over 30 pupils (more usually 40 or even 50), congested on benches ... accommodated in an unsuitably shaped room, ill-graded, with a [non-native speaker teacher], working in a hot climate. ... The pupils in such schools are more subject to Elimination [i.e. drop-out] than those who are more favourably circumstanced”

# ‘Difficult circumstances’ are ‘normal’

- Most (English) teaching in the world has always occurred and still occurs in primary and secondary schools, in such circumstances
- In this sense, these are ‘normal’ circumstances – but are dysfunctionally neglected!

# Teacher-learner autonomy

**Learner autonomy** – a readiness to take charge of one's own learning in the service of one's needs and purposes. This entails a capacity and willingness to act independently and in cooperation with others, as a socially responsible person.

( 'Bergen definition', in Trebbi 1990)

# Teacher-learner autonomy

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(based on 'Bergen definition', in Trebbi 1990)

# Teacher autonomy

Teacher autonomy can be seen, broadly, as  
'freedom from constraints'

But, more realistically, perhaps – teacher  
autonomy involves exploring, exploiting  
negotiating 'spaces of freedom' / 'spaces  
for manoeuvre', involving others (including  
students)

for one's own benefit, and for and with one's  
students

## 2. Identify the 'topic the questions are embedded in'!

Topic area: (English) language teaching methodology.

The questions relate to the post-1990 'critical turn' in ELT, resting on the assumption that context-sensitive approaches to ELT methodology are necessary.

Q1 ('How can English teachers develop appropriate methodology?')

... seeking to identify / bring into being *suitable foundations for language teaching*, given what we know about the inappropriateness of top-down / centre-periphery proposals.

Q2 ('How can English teachers have autonomy?')

... seeking to identify / bring about *suitable conditions and procedures* for teachers to develop appropriate methodology 'from the bottom up'.

Note: both are *practical* questions – 'research & development questions' not just research questions

Antecedents: previous attempts to move the field beyond (prescriptive) methods

- B. Kumaravadivelu – post-method pedagogy
- H.H. Stern (1983) *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching*
- W.F. Mackey (1965) – ‘methodics’ (*Language Teaching Analysis*)
- Harold Palmer (1917) – *The Scientific Study and Teaching of Languages*
- Henry Sweet (1899) – *The Practical Study of Languages*



# THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY & TEACHING OF LANGUAGES

A REVIEW OF THE FACTORS AND PROBLEMS  
CONNECTED WITH THE LEARNING AND  
TEACHING OF MODERN LANGUAGES WITH  
AN ANALYSIS OF THE VARIOUS METHODS  
WHICH MAY BE ADOPTED IN ORDER TO  
ATTAIN SATISFACTORY RESULTS

*By*

HAROLD E. PALMER

ASSISTANT IN THE PHONETICS DEPARTMENT  
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# Harold E. Palmer (1878–1949)



According to Palmer (1917), why was there a need for a new 'science of language teaching'?

“ce n'est pas la méthode qui nous manque; ce qui nous manque c'est la base même de la méthode” (Palmer 1917)

(“it is not 'method' that we lack; what we lack is a *basis* for method” (my translation))

“no one programme can possibly be ideally suitable for all classes of students; hence, in addition to the Standard Programme that we have ... described, we must be prepared to draw up Special Programmes’ (Palmer 1917: 16)

As a language teacher in Belgium, Palmer ...

“explored the possibilities of one method after another, both as teacher and student. He would devise, adopt, modify or reject one plan after another as the result of further research and experience in connexion with many languages – living and artificial.”

‘Scientific method’, according to Palmer (1917: 20):

(a) To collect isolated facts and factors in such numbers as to cover the whole field of inquiry.

(b) To classify, examine, and correlate them.

(c) To draw from them certain conclusions upon which the fundamental principles may be established and stated in categoric terms.

(d) To confirm and justify these principles by putting them to the test of actual and continual practice.

# The Institute for Research in English Teaching, Tokyo (founded 1923)

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# DHI FONÈTIK TÏTCER

*Dhi organ ov dhi fonètik tÏtcerz' asóciécon*

édited bai PAUL PASSY

NEUILLY-SUR-SEINE (NIR PARIS) FRANS

10. Fèbruari 1887. (500 kopiz)

## List of memberz for 1887.

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*Prèzident*: P. Passy, Neuilly-sur-Seine, Franse.

*Vais-Prèzidents*: W. Maxton, 6, rue Vernier, Paris.

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*Trèjurer*: J. Bruce, 25 Avenue de l'Opéra, Paris.

*Members* (1); Kand. R. Arpi, Upsala, Sverige.

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Dr. K. Brekke, Industrigate 23, Kristiania, Norge.

◦ A. Briscoe, rue de la Carpe 2, Ghent, Belgie.

J. Clephan, 28 Silver street, Stokton-on-Tees, Ingland.

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Dr. A. Hamilton, Toronto, Canada.

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(1) Aktiv-memberz markt ◦.

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◦ Dr. H. Klinghart. Reichenbach in Solesjen, Deutschland.

Dr. K. Kühn, Karstrasse 9, Wiesbaden, Deutschland.

J. Limousin, 64 rue d'Alésia, Paris.

◦ G. Montourcy, 66 Av. Philippe-Auguste, Paris.

J. Macrae, Hotel de Londres, Menton.

Dr. C. Mortet, 8 rue Labordère, Neuilly-sur-Seine.

H. Motte, 94 rue de Lonchamps, Neuilly-sur-Seine.

M<sup>me</sup> H. Motte, Neuilly-sur-Seine.

M<sup>me</sup> A. Mühlbacher, 14 rue de Varenne, Paris.

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Dr. Rhode, Lübber i. L., Deutschland.

◦ M<sup>me</sup> E. Saglier, Enghien, Seine-et-Oise, Franse.

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Dr. J. de Vries Van Donsburgh, Dordrecht, Nederland.

M. Waltar, Realschule, Kassel, Deutschland.

A. Western, Fredrikstad, Norge.

G. Zeega, Reikjavik, Island.

## Korespondens (1).

*From Dr. Klinghardt.* — Dhi niu prógram ov dhi F. T. A. iz kwait fòrst-rét. For mai

(1) Som ov aur korespondents ták grét péns tu réit dhi smól kápital N as wi print it. Thanky dhem, wi wud sé that N iz évil a mék-sit for Mr. Pitman's sein, hwitc iz not found in aur printin-étis. In skript, wi óives yús dhi fonètipik lèter (an órdinari s with a tál), hwitc aur printer néé wél-and trans-litèrés bai N.





- Sweet – phonetics as the ‘indispensable foundation
- Palmer’s alternative applied linguistics
- Post-WWII ‘Linguistics applied’
- 1970s–80s ‘Applied linguistics’ (Widdowson)
- and now? (need for a reconfiguration, again putting practice first?)

### 3. Explain why the questions are interesting and important for you!

They derive from my (professional) autobiography and certain personality traits (questioning 'givens', seeking 'the other')

My own 'critical turn' in 1990s Japan – I was a teacher seeking an alternative to 'weak version' CLT.

Developing experience as a teacher *educator* in Japan and the UK (2000+), again, I was seeking *alternatives* to (imposition of) CLT.

Note: annoyance / opposition / questioning as motivators of research (not necessarily specific 'research questions')

# 4. Illustrate whether you have already (partly) found answers to the questions!

(in order of 'discovery')

- A. Pedagogy of autonomy as appropriate methodology
- B. Understanding 'teacher-learner autonomy'
- C. Historical sense as a foundation
- D. Teachers sharing success stories
- E. Valuing teacher associations
- F. Teacher-research (for difficult circumstances)

[note: research approach – 'documentation']

# A. Pedagogy of autonomy as appropriate methodology

1. Own practice in Japan (Smith 2001, 2002, 2003) – pedagogy of autonomy / action research

[JALT Learner Development SIG]

# Learner Autonomy Across Cultures

## Language Education Perspectives

Edited by David Palfreyman and Richard C. Smith



## B. Understanding 'teacher-learner autonomy'

1. Teachers' language learning (Smith 2000)
2. Teacher-learning (1) – workshop and conference design (Barfield & Smith 1999)
3. Teacher-learning (2) – action research in initial teacher education (e.g. Smith and Erdogan 2008)





## C. Historical sense as a foundation

1. **Appreciating IRLT & Harold E. Palmer** (e.g. Smith 1999) vs. **limitations of reforms from outside** (Smith & Imura 2004)
2. **ELT roots and tradition** (e.g. Routledge 2000-2005) and **deconstructing mythologies** (Hunter & Smith; Howatt & Smith 2014)
3. Promoting History of ELT ( Warwick ELT Archive; Smith 2016)



## Warwick ELT Archive

## D. Teachers sharing success stories

- TELCnet – Teaching English in Large Classes research network
- Kuchah & Smith (2011)
- Smith, Padwad & Bullock (2017)
- Smith, Kuchah & Lamb (2018)





# Teaching in low-resource classrooms: voices of experience

Edited by Richard Smith, Amol Padwad and Deborah Bullock



# E. Valuing teacher associations

- Rixon and Smith (2017)
- Smith and Kuchah (2016)



A HISTORY  
OF  
**iatefl**

Shelagh Rixon and Richard Smith

# Cameroon English Language and Literature Teachers' Association (CAMELTA)

[HOME](#)

[RECENT EVENTS](#)

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[CAMELTA CHAPTERS](#)



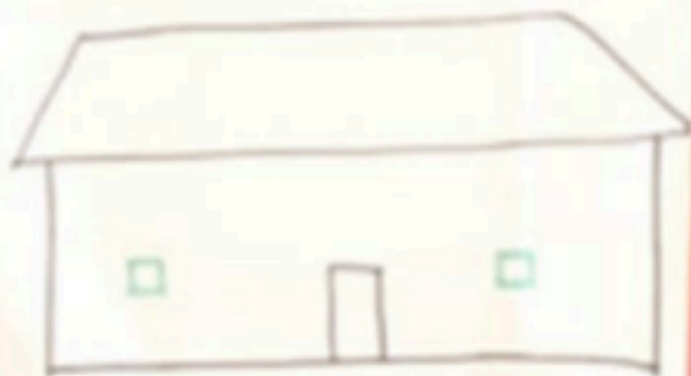
## F. Teacher-research (for difficult circumstances)

1. IATEFL Research SIG – Teachers Research! concept
2. Chile Champion Teachers project – *exploratory* action research Teachers research!
3. Children and children as co-researchers in Indian primary classrooms
4. Innovative ways of sharing teacher-research
5. Teacher-research mentoring schemes (Festival, EVO)

# The Champion Teachers project in Chile (2013+)



After 2 teachers remain absent.  
The classes become noisy if I go  
on attending one class to the other



- ⊙ How to handle two classes at one time?
- ⊙ How to cope when no partition?

- Teacher should find out the reason why the students are noisy and uninterested in activity. He should adopt such kind of activity which are interesting, innovative, fun and according to the level of the students.

- As the number of students are less...

From where can we  
get ideas?  
From peers.  
Teachers from other schools  
Experienced teachers  
Organized research...

- The steps how we  
- Discussed among  
- Took suggestions  
- Took suggestions  
- We compiled the

### Solutions:

- Engage the different  
eg. If one class is  
classes will be busy
- For grammar class  
together and engage
- Warmers at the  
be suitable for
- Bright students...

# Champion Teachers: stories of exploratory action research

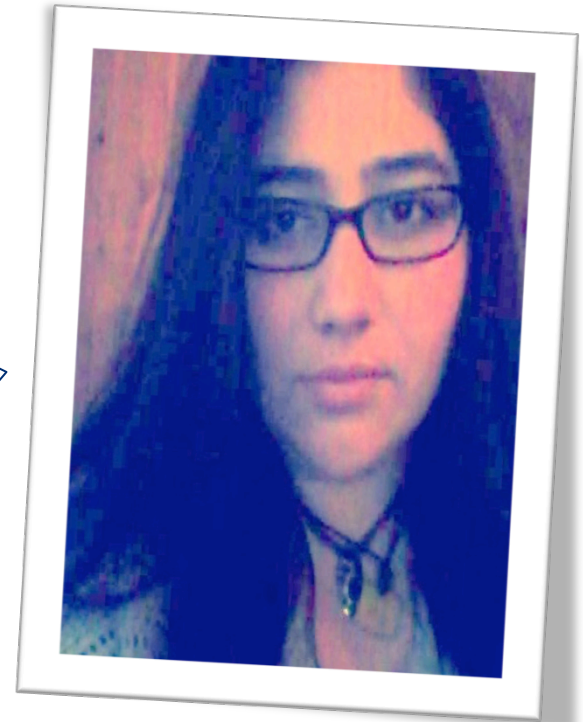
Edited by Paula Rebolledo, Richard Smith and Deborah Bullock



Action research is important because it lights a spark in the darkness of the system; it lights a spark in the mentality of the people who do not want to change; and it lights a spark in the school by making people believe that they own the changes that can be made in any learning environment.'



We need to stop focusing on our concerns and pay more attention to our students' concerns. As a result of this project, I feel that I am more empathetic'





**I heard my  
students.  
I saw myself**



# trfestival.wordpress.com

## The International Festival of Teacher- Research in ELT

*Face-to-face and online events promoting teacher-research as an empowering means of professional development for English teachers working in difficult circumstances worldwide*

ABOUT · **UPCOMING EVENTS** ▾ · EVENTS SO FAR ▾ · RESOURCES ▾ · STEERING COMMITTEE ·

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14–15 September – AINET International  
Teacher Research Conference,  
Nagpur, India

🔍 Search

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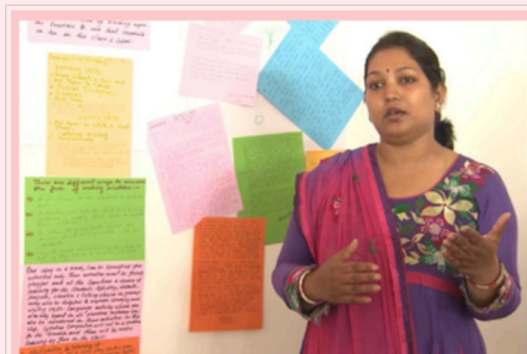
The first ever ELT Teacher-research Conference in India is being organised by the [All-India Network of English Teachers \(AINET\)](#) in collaboration with G. S. College of Commerce & Economics, [Nagpur](#) and with the support of the British Council, Regional English

Language Office, US Embassy, and IATEFL Research SIG. Teachers in schools, colleges and other institutions will share their studies and participate in an international exchange of ideas, experiences and developments in teacher-

# Electronic Village Online (EVO) 2018

## Classroom-based Research for Professional Development EVO

[HOME](#)   [EVO2017](#)



**CLASSROOM-BASED RESEARCH FOR  
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

We started EVO2017 on 9th January 2017 and ended on 13th February 2017. There were also some final presentations by participants in April 2017. Until we start registering participants for the follow-up EVO2018 (probably in November 2017), you are welcome to browse the 2017 materials by clicking on the links below.

This **EVO Project**, led by a **team of ten volunteer teacher educators and supported by several teacher associations**, provided a hands-on introduction to inquiry-based teacher development, especially (though not exclusively) for teachers working in difficult circumstances (large classes, low-resource classrooms,

etc.). The five-week workshop took participants through different stages of teacher-research, engaging them in practical activities to gradually build their confidence in teacher-research. There are further details below

## 5. Show how the question(s) might shape foreign language research!

Reminder of questions:

Q1: How can English teachers [in public education systems and in 'difficult circumstances'] develop appropriate methodology?

Q2: How can they have autonomy?

# Research *for* ELT practitioners ('ELT research')

Consider the wider purpose / value of your research

Build in teachers' / learners' perspectives at all stages

The field could be reconfigured to facilitate this, and to validate 'praxis' as well as background research (Applied Linguistics → 'ELT research'?)

‘ELT research’ was defined (in a 2009–13 British Council project) as referring to any research whose data and/or findings relate directly to the teaching, learning or assessment of English as a Foreign, Second or Additional Language in the UK or any other context.

Taking the notion of 'ELT research' further – building more of a focus on practitioners' concerns into the stages of research prior to dissemination ...

‘ELT research’ can be (re)defined more radically as ‘research which is planned, carried out and/or disseminated with the (active and equal) engagement of ELT practitioners’, e.g.:

- In formulating research issues and questions
- In planning data collection approach
- In analysing data
- In interpreting the findings
- In sharing the research



e.g. in the context of ...

- Researcher–teacher collaborations
- University/Training college–school partnerships
- Teacher association research
- Encouragement of teacher-research via existing and new networks

# 2018

EVO 2017–18 (January–February). Book summing up teacher-research for difficult circumstances work ?

Extensions of ...

*A Handbook for Exploratory Action Research* (with Paula Rebolledo). British Council (forthcoming, January 2018)

- India, Nepal, Latin America

Teacher Association Research (project)

# 'Aspirations'

HoLLT: forthcoming publications

Continuing to build History of Language Learning and Teaching – cf. 2018 meeting in Reading, 2019 conference in Bremen (?); 2020 AILA Congress in Groningen

A plurilingual, interdisciplinary, intercultural field

And a *useful* one! Historical research as a basis for teacher education in a wider range of countries

Continuing deconstruction of ELT UK / valuing 'local' histories

# Conclusion

'We need powerful questions for powerful answers' (Champion Teacher)

'There exist answers to which the questions are waiting to be discovered'

Resources: [warwick.ac.uk/richardcsmith/  
bremen](http://warwick.ac.uk/richardcsmith/bremen)