

Teaching English in difficult circumstances: autonomy and practitioner research

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Yesterday's lecture

- 1) Critiquing myths and methods
- 2) Deconstructive history: insights from historical research into the roots of 'ELT'

We are supposed to live in a 'post-method era', but ...

- the concept of 'method' still predominates as a way for conceptualizing teaching;
- 'methods-in-materials' are dominant in practice;
- in-service teacher training and teacher association events are often set up for the provision of 'recipes' / quick-fix 'solutions'
- externally imposed teaching competency frameworks are increasingly dominant

- the concept of ‘method’ is still dominant as a way for conceptualizing teaching (cf. pre-service training);

Because of ...

the academic and commercial interests ‘methods’ serve – and a continuing fetishism of / lack of understanding of the limitations of ‘science’ and of applying science in our field

- ‘methods-in-materials’ are dominant in practice;

because of ...

hard-selling of materials and associated testing systems – and the deskilling / decline of teacher agency they entail;

- in-service teacher training and teacher association activities are often set up to favour 'recipes' / quick-fix 'solutions' and (celebrity-centred) entertainment;

Because ...

Advertising is a powerful force -- it is said that busy teachers want entertainment and recipes – not something more serious. But this creates / reinforces dependency

- externally determined teaching competency frameworks are increasingly dominant

Because ...

We do not define teaching competence for ourselves

So, how do we change this situation (if we want to!)?

1) Deconstruction –

Deconstruct allegiance to methods, (misapplied) science, commercial interests, published materials and testing systems, recipes / quick-fix ‘solutions’, celebrity-centred entertainment, externally imposed teaching competency frameworks

2) Construction-

After methods – what then? (today’s lecture)

Learner autonomy is characterised by 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)

Autonomy doesn't make the teacher
redundant – in fact the teacher's role in
engaging and developing it is crucial

Collaboration is an important aspect –
autonomy isn't equivalent to
'individualism'

Increasingly, autonomy has been associated with classrooms.

Teachers:

- manage the classroom so that students' autonomy is *engaged*
- scaffold the *development* of autonomy (via reflection on learning)

Pedagogy for autonomy

Two aspects

- Increasing students' input into what goes on in the classroom (*Engagement* of their autonomy as learners)
- Developing students' understanding of themselves as learners (*Development* of their autonomy as learners)

Some small steps to autonomy

- Ask students what they do outside in relation to English, and/or what they could do, and/or what they have done before but have now stopped doing.

- Make sure the students get to hear about one another's ideas, and suggest further ideas for out-of-class learning that you may have heard of.

- Ask students to choose what they'd like to do to improve their English outside class, perhaps in replacement for (some of) their homework. Give them some kind of credit for out-of-class learning. Ask them to commit to some kind of contract for this learning.

- Find time for sharing, evaluation and replanning of out-of-class learning contracts

- Ask students at the end of a normal lesson what suggestions they have for classroom work (or 'points to improve' and 'good points' about the lesson)
- Summarize students' opinions / suggestions for classroom work and [a big step] act on (some of) them, then evaluate together.

- [a bigger step] Suggest the formation of learning groups which will take forward some of the suggestions more ‘independently’
- Evaluate (with possibility of reverting to previous arrangements) and replan, together with students

Today's lecture

- 1) Teaching in difficult circumstances
- 2) Pedagogy of autonomy as a kind of 'rescue solution'
- 3) Teacher-research for difficult circumstances

‘DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES’

- Michael West’s (1960) *Teaching English in Difficult Circumstances*
- Most (English) teaching in the world has occurred and still occurs in such circumstances
- However, concern with difficult circumstances seemed to decline with the rise of UK-based ELT in the 1960s and (especially) 1970s.



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Madhav's story (from Prem Phyak's
research)

(a rural Nepalese secondary school)

Now, I am a teacher and I have been teaching different subjects for more than a decade. I am facing similar problem as my teachers faced. I have to teach more than sixty students in the same class and I know that some of my friends are teaching more than a hundred.

Issues of multicultural education, quality education, sustainable education etc. are in the debate and World-class education has been a felt need but we have crowded classes with lack of resources. Although I am not satisfied with what I have done to solve my problem; the steps I have taken in the class have at least reduced dropout and repetition to some degree.

Nearly four different ethnic communities are available in the catchment area of my school. Students from Newari community speak Newari language as their first language and Paharis, Tamangs and Magars have their own language (except Paharis) and culture. Using some aspects of their language and talking about their feasts and festival in the class, I address

their linguistic as well as cultural identity. As a result, they all feel welcome in the class even if it is crowded. They never feel that teachers do not care about them. It helps me make my students feel supported during my class. I find students working vigorously when I make groups mixing all ethnic identities. ...

- A few talented students generally dominate the large size classes. They can help the teacher to teach effectively. My way of mobilizing them helps me. I place them in different benches and assign them to help other weak students. Another way that I use is to administer Proficiency test before I start the course. According to the score they obtain, they are placed in such a way that the weak students will get helping hands.

It is, of course, a troublesome job for the teacher to have individual care in a large size class. A student hardly get half a minute within 40-45 minutes 'class. After the presentation of the lesson, the students are supposed to do some class work. It is not possible to reach to each individual

To solve this problem, I just go through the answers of one student per bench and ask him to help his friends. I have found peer correction and self-correction techniques useful in such classes.

Large size class is not only a problem or burden of teachers but also an opportunity to explore new techniques and tools.

TELC (Teaching English in Large Classes) Network

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TELC Home

Network rationale

Large class size is a challenge faced by many teachers and learners around the world and is a particular issue in many 'developing' countries where teacher recruitment has not kept pace with rapid increases in school enrolments. Investigations of large class size and other challenges involved in teaching in 'difficult circumstances' constitute the focus of our concern as a research network.

bit.ly/telcnet-home

***What
challenges
do teachers
face?***



<http://www.publicdomainpictures.net/view-image.php?image=7018&picture=primary-school-students>
Primary School Students by Peter Griffin

1. I have too much homework to mark. It is impossible to give effective feedback to everyone.

2. Not all students participate due to being in a large class.

3. It is difficult to get students' attention to stop them working on a pair or group task.

4. The noise level in my class is too high.

5. Students in a large class often have mixed abilities. It is difficult to cater for students with such different levels and needs.

6. It is difficult to achieve rapport with the students

7. Students' individual responses are difficult to hear.

8. It is difficult to promote active learning in large classes when resources such as textbooks, flash cards are limited.

students' names in a large class.

10. I am sometimes in despair at my inability to manage a large class.

Challenge #1

“I have too much homework to mark. It is impossible to give effective feedback to everyone.”

Suggestion

Engaging students in peer feedback, in other words getting them to comment on / mark one another's work.

“I have made buddy groups consisting of 5-6 students each. In each buddy group an ‘above average’ and an ‘average’ student comprises a part of the team . This has been done with the

Challenge #1

“I have too much homework to mark. It is impossible to give effective feedback to everyone.”

Please briefly describe anything you have done which helped to solve this problem.

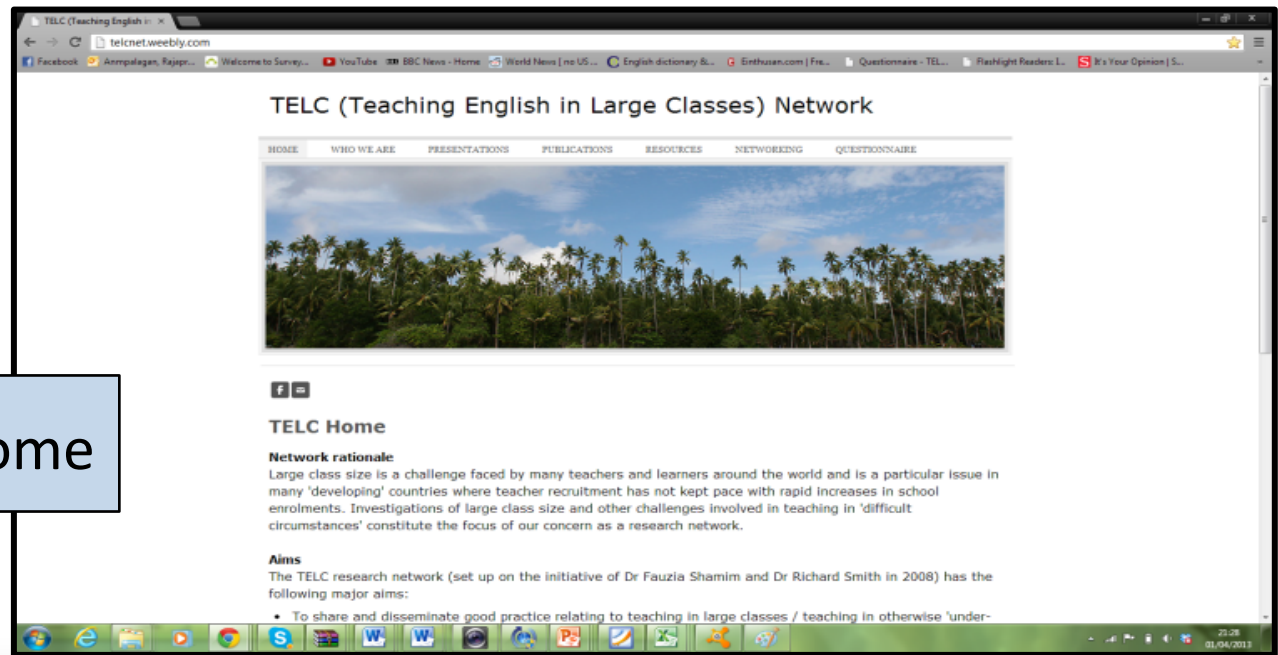
**“I use bright students. They are regarded [as] mentors in the class. As they have well performance in the class and very quick to teachers response, the weak students feel free to take their help.”
(Bangladesh)**

“Make students submit group assignments. Divide the students into mixed ability groups of 5-7 students, with one student (the brightest) as mentor. Give small tasks to individual members who can discuss their answers with one other student of their choice, who then submits their work to the mentor, who puts together their group assignment and submits it.”

(India)

Problem	Please briefly describe	Is the	Would	Why not?
Yes	<p><u>Challenge # 3</u></p> <p>“It is difficult to get students’ attention to stop them working on a pair or group task.”</p>			
Some			s	-
es			a	-
Yes				
Sometim	A bit of TPR works, use a	Yes	I use this	
es	keyword, g			
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	over.			
Sometim	Once the st			
es	involved in			
	like comple			
	hour gets o			
	<p><u>Suggestion</u></p> <p>Raising your hand – and training students to do the same.</p>			
	<p>CONTEXT: INDIA</p>			Their mind still

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facebook.com/groups/telcgroup/

2) Pedagogy of autonomy as a kind of 'rescue solution'

Two observations:

- * Teachers' success stories often seem to involve engaging student autonomy
- * Teachers who are focused on engaging students' autonomy often seem to have begun to do so in response to difficult situations



EAB®

Equation
$$\frac{d}{dx} \int_0^x f(x) dx = f(x)$$
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Principles from this practice

1. Get to know learners as unique individuals
(recognize the variety of their talents) / *build rapport*

- ‘It is only through the proper rapport that an atmosphere conducive to learning can be built up. Also, ‘humanizing’ a large class is perhaps the only way to motivate learning’

(Sarwar 1994)

2. Negotiate with learners (learners as partners not adversaries); Define common goals / make a contract
 - What do we want to achieve?
 - How shall we achieve it?
 - Where shall we find the resources we need?

3. View learners as resource providers and as resources themselves (Use 'found texts' / Engage in creative writing – develop creativity, critical thinking and 'voice')

It will help if previously you:

4. Build rapport with / build up credit with administration and colleagues

- ‘[T]he larger the class and the more difficult the circumstances, the more important it is to stress learning as the objective. And the higher the elimination, the more necessary it is to do so: if a pupil has learnt how to learn he can go on learning afterwards’ (West 1960: 15).

‘Training learners to monitor their own learning is as important in a large class as in a small one – in fact, more important, because in a small class, work can be supervised by the teacher, but in a large class this is virtually impossible’. (Sarwar 1994, p. 131)

A good father does not give his son meat. Instead, he gives him a bow and arrow, and teaches him to hunt.

(African saying)

Learner autonomy is characterised by 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)

3) Teacher-research for difficult circumstances

Lack of research into / writing on appropriate methodology for such circumstances

TELCnet research agenda

→ Need for / value of teacher-research







The Champion Teachers project



Champion Teachers: stories of exploratory action research

Edited by Paula Rebolledo, Richard Smith and Deborah Bullock



Some facts about teachers!

- Teachers work 40 – 44 hours per week and have limited time to plan.
- Teachers need to manage many things at the same time (sometimes many jobs!).
- Teachers teach large classes (40-45 Ss) per class.
- Teachers think research is something only scholars and professors do.



Images of research



Images of research



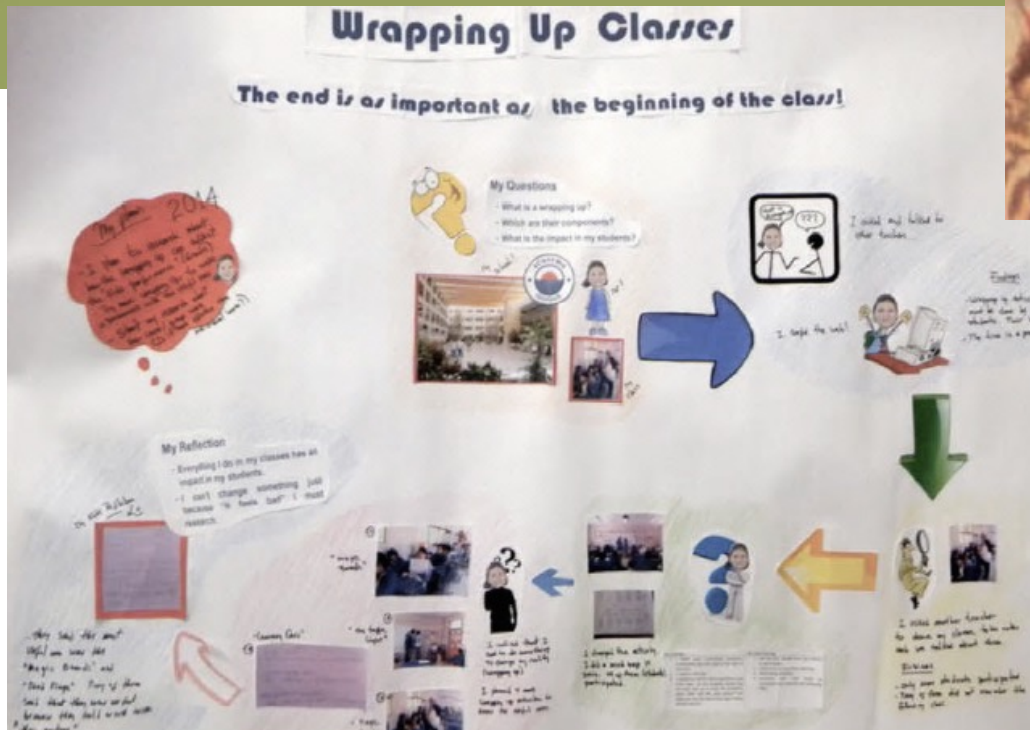
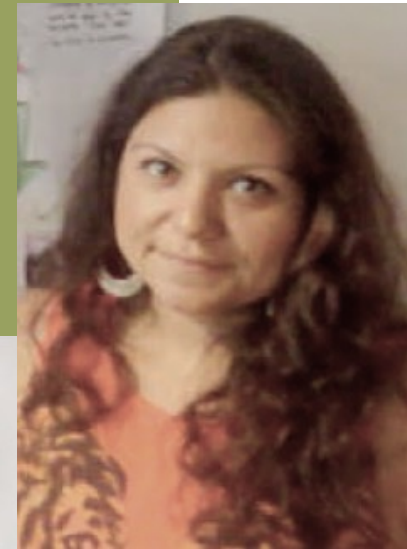
Images of research



1

Wrapping up classes

Andrea Robles López
Iquique, Chile



Andrea's research...

Wrapping up classes, the end is as important as the beginning of the class!

- Her Context...
 - High school class
 - 40 – 42 students per class

Andrea's puzzle

Is she wrapping up her lessons effectively?

Step 1:

She decided to find out the answer...

1. What is a wrapping up?
2. What are the characteristics of a wrapping up?
3. How do her students react in that part of the class?

Step 2:

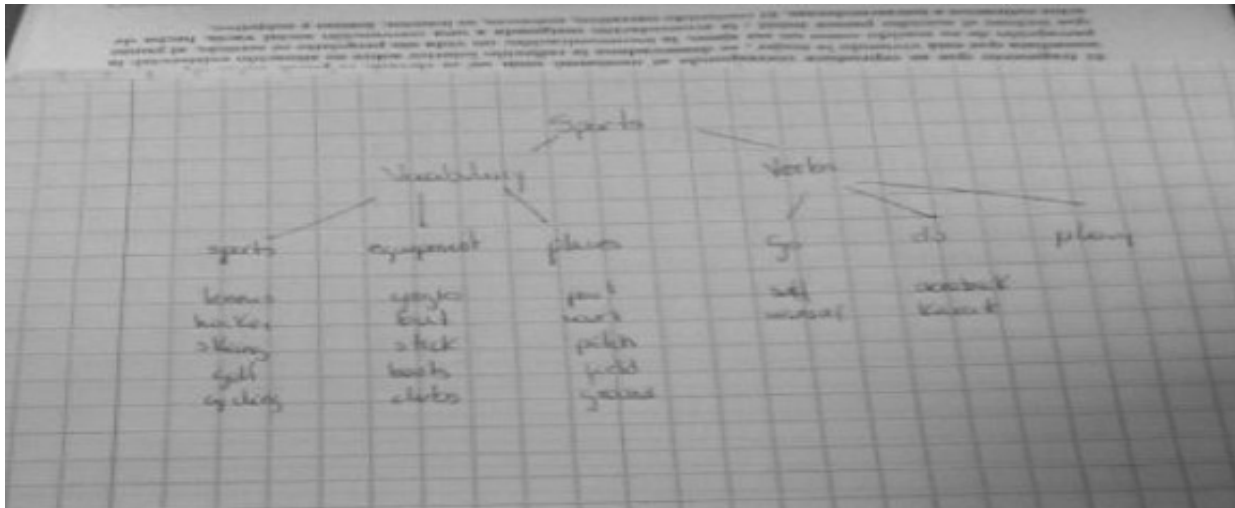
- She asked some colleagues about wrapping up.
- She surfed the web for answers.
- She asked a colleague to observe her class.
- She made a parallel of what she was doing and her ideal wrapping up.

WHAT DID SHE FIND OUT?

- Her colleagues and she had the same thoughts about wrapping up 😊
- The article on the web also confirmed her ideas 😊
- There was a huge difference between what she was doing and what she thought was right.
- Every time she repeated the same question at the end of the class, her students packed their things to leave 😞
- She had to do something about it

Step 3: Action

- She decided to try a different activity and see what happened.



Step 4

- Come back to step 2... 😊

- She asked some colleagues about wrapping up.
- She surfed the web for answers.
- She asked a colleague to observe her class.
- She made a parallel of what she was doing and her ideal wrapping up.

Step 5:

- Think of and plan different activities as wrapping up.



lo que aprendí...
A usar los modal verbs y las Future Forms

No me puedo dar...
los "listening" y la pronunciación

me gustaría aprender...
ver películas en inglés y más vocabulario

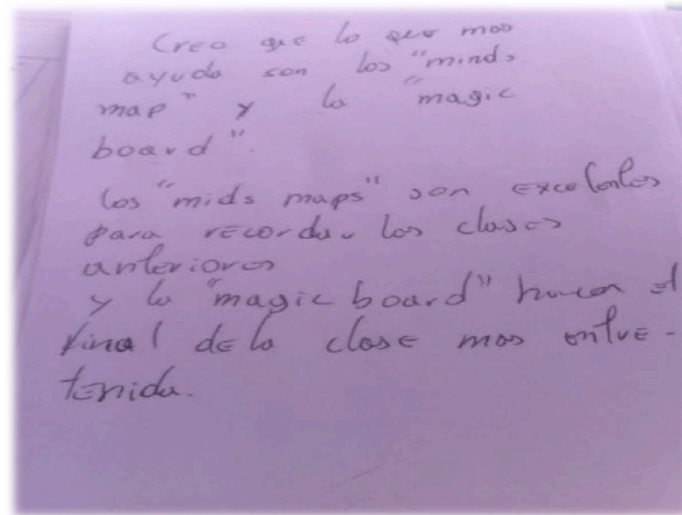
Step 6

- Come back to step 2 😊

- She asked some colleagues about wrapping up.
- She surfed the web for answers.
- She asked a colleague to observe her class.
- She made a parallel of what she was doing and her ideal wrapping up.

Step 7

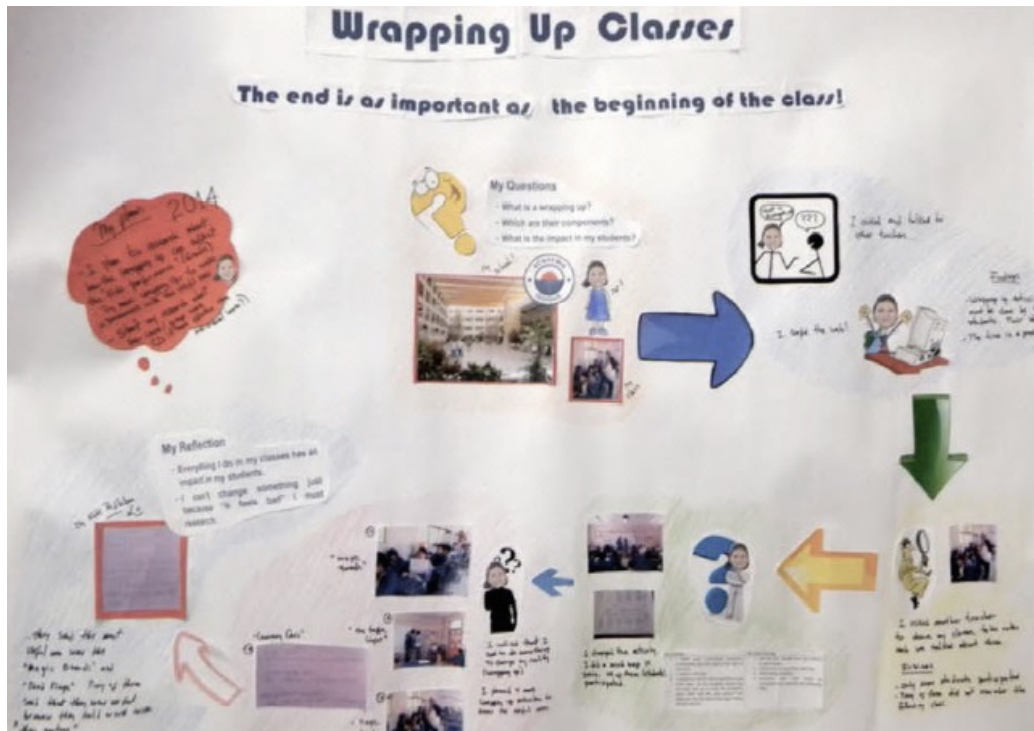
- Asked her students about the activities



Andrea's reflections

- Discovering is more important than solving a problem.
- Teaching is learning!
- Teachers are powerful.
- Research helps you to know why you are doing something and not just acting because of a feeling.
- Research is not only for experts... teachers have much more things to say because we are the ones who are inside the classroom.
- Accept that we make mistakes or maybe we do not do thing in the best way...

- Was this research?
- Was it feasible?



Definitions of research

Research is ...

‘a process of inquiry consisting of three [...] components: (1) a question, problem, or hypothesis, (2) data, (3) analysis and interpretation of data’ (Nunan 1992)

‘the organized, systematic search for answers to the questions we ask’ (Hatch and Lazaraton 1991: 1)

‘systematic enquiry made public’ (Stenhouse 1975)



Exploratory Action Research (EAR)

Exploratory action research

- A) **Plan to explore** [an issue] -- Questions
 - B) **Explore** [gather evidence] -- Evidence
 - C) **Evaluate** [with evidence] -- Evaluation
-
1. **Plan** [a change]
 2. **Act** [implement the change]
 3. **Observe** [evaluate the effects – with evidence]
 4. **Reflect** [interpret what occurred]

What to research?

- Something that worked in your practice and you would like to explore further.
- Something that you are unsure about your student-teachers' learning and/or your teaching.
- Something that didn't work and you would like to improve.



- *An aspect of my institution / my classes I am happy with is....*
- *I am / My colleagues are unhappy about....*
- *I wonder whether*
- *I'd like to find out more about*

Clarifying questions

Asking a speaker to explain more about the situation.



Exploratory questions

- **Exploring importance and meaning**

- What do you mean by X?
- Which aspect of X?
- What is X?
- Why X?
- When does X happen?



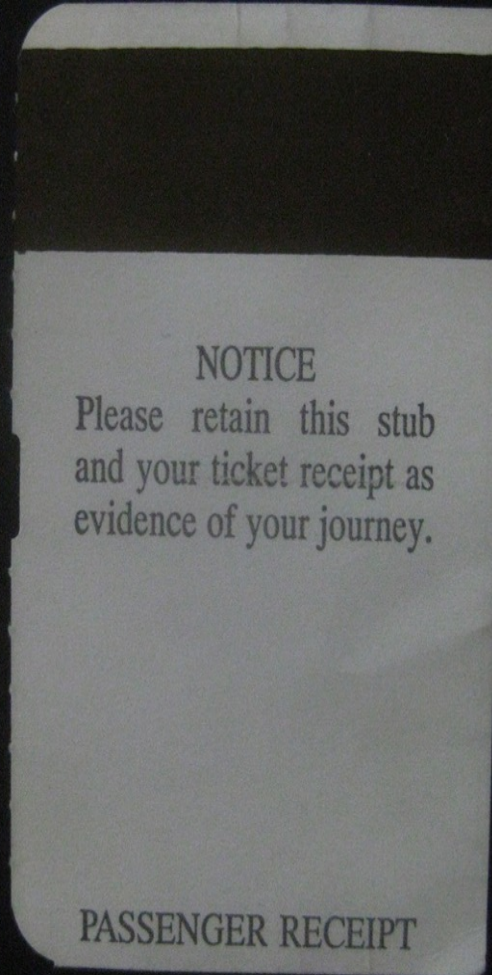
- **Exploring perceptions**

- What do you/your learners say when X occurs?
- Do your learners share your view about X?

- **Exploring behaviour**

- What do you/your learners do/say when X occurs?
- Do you/your students react in the same way?

From questions to answers



Evidence: *n.* 'Information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid; information used to establish facts' (*Concise Oxford Dictionary*)

Kinds of evidence



Champion Teachers: stories of exploratory action research

Edited by Paula Rebolledo, Richard Smith and Deborah Bullock

Find more EAR
stories here





‘My research journey started with a feeling, just a feeling that something wasn’t right. Going from that feeling to asking why, and finding out what works is the key.’

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**



Better **images** of research?



Conclusion

Learner autonomy is characterised by 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 is characterised by 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.

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

Teacher autonomy

Teacher autonomy can be seen as ‘freedom from constraints’

More realistically, perhaps – exploring and exploiting ‘spaces of freedom’ / ‘spaces for manoeuvre’ *with others*

for one’s own purposes, and for and with one’s students

- ‘Through dialogue the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teachers. The teacher is no longer the-one-who-teaches but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow.’

Paulo Freire