

and onsite) seems to have been the result of the benefits of the meetings as opposed to instrumental motivation, which naturally characterizes reaction to professional activities in Cameroon.

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Biodata

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The International Festival of Teacher-research in ELT

Richard Smith, interviewed by Deborah Bullock

From April 2017 to March 2018, [The International Festival of Teacher-Research in ELT](#) featured a range of face-to-face and online events promoting and showcasing teacher-research by teachers of English around the world.



The festival aimed to promote teacher-research (research initiated and carried out by teachers into issues of importance to them in their own work) as an empowering means of professional development.

A key objective of the festival was to help more individual teachers engage in teacher-research. The festival also sought to encourage Teacher Associations (TAs) to support teacher-research by showcasing existing models of mentoring schemes.

Twelve separate events took place in 2017, and one of the last events of the Festival was the IATEFL Research SIG supported January–February 2018 Electronic Village Online experience, 'Classroom-based research for professional development', which offered voluntary online mentoring to participants from all over the world. You can find more information, including photos and videos from each event on [The International Festival of Teacher-Research in ELT](#) website.

In this interview, Richard Smith, the instigator of the Festival and Chair of its Steering Committee, explains further what the Festival has been for, what it has achieved, and what he hopes its legacy might be.

First of all, Richard, what exactly was the 'International Festival of Teacher-research in ELT'? And why call it a 'festival'?

Well, at the beginning of 2017 I realized there were going to be a lot of teacher-research events going on during the year in different parts of the world and the idea came to me that it'd be good to try to bring them all under one umbrella, to promote teacher-research in a very practical way and link people up internationally with one another. It was great that various groups also saw the value of this and quickly agreed to come together to support and publicise the initiative – IATEFL Research SIG especially, but also TESOL, the British Council, IATEFL Teacher Development SIG, and various teacher associations.¹ I tried to ensure that all the events that

¹ Here is the full list of supporters: [IATEFL Research SIG](#), [IATEFL Teacher Development SIG](#), [All-India Network of English Teachers \(AINET\)](#), [Federación Argentina de Asociaciones de Profesores de Inglés \(FAAPI\)](#), [TESOL International Association](#), [CAMELTA](#), [APIBA](#), and [British Council English Agenda](#), [British Council TeachingEnglish](#) and [TIRE](#) also highlighted the festival in blog posts.

happened – in Glasgow, Argentina, Istanbul, India and Adelaide as well as internationally online – were at least partially video-recorded and that video and reports were put on the Festival website, so that as many people as possible could benefit. So, the Festival was basically a series of events in different places with recordings made and as much publicity attached as possible so that more teachers and teacher educators worldwide would get to hear about teacher-research and see its value, not just in the abstract but via concrete examples in different settings.

I thought calling it a 'festival' would convey well the sense of a kind of celebration – of teachers taking matters into their own hands, of teacher-research being seen to be actually happening around the world. And being seen as something colourful, not dry, drab, scary or academic!

And what prompted you to focus on and promote teacher-research, and initiate this 'festival'?

Well, ever since I became coordinator of the Research SIG in 2011 – and this carried on after I stepped down in 2015 – I saw promoting teacher-research as something particularly valuable that the SIG could do – partly this was because I'd found it to be valuable in my own development as a teacher, partly because it's consistent with the notion of pursuing 'appropriate' methodology in a relatively bottom-up manner, since, after all, teachers are the foremost experts on their own classrooms.

As coordinator, then, I felt that the Research SIG should not just be promoting engagement with existing research but should also be encouraging teachers to get engaged *in* research, demystifying research and, in a way, democratizing it. So I got involved in organising events such as workshops, with Anne Burns, Dick Allwright, and so on, and then the all-day event *Teachers Research!* at IATEFL in 2011 as a kind of culmination of this (in the sense that it provided a place for people who'd been inspired by the workshops to present on their research). That event turned out to be just another beginning, though, and it inspired the concept of a full-scale conference in Istanbul, which has been going on annually for a number of years now – and a parallel conference with the same name in Latin America (held in Santiago in 2016 and Buenos Aires in 2017). Then, after 2013 I became involved in advising on some teacher-research mentoring projects for the British Council – in Chile and India and, relatively recently, in Peru and Nepal.

In 2017–2018 I also led the TESOL Electronic Village Online on 'Classroom-based research for professional development'. So, one thing led to another – 'snowballed', you could say. Actually, I was finding it hard to keep track of all the things going on and that was another reason for initiating the Festival – to maintain a kind of overall understanding (not least in my own brain) of everything that was going on! Bringing all these

events together in some way also seemed to reflect the international spirit of the EVO which had just ended. At the same time, several of the Festival events have a particular focus on ELT in 'difficult circumstances', which was my particular focus during 2017–18, with an ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) project on that.



Were there any other reasons you wanted to link up these events?

Well, in a way it was already beginning to happen – for example, building on work done the previous year by Kenan Dikilitaş and Aslı Sağlam (both from Turkey), I brought together Paula Rebolledo (Chile) with Amol Padwad (India) as main presenters of the EVO in January 2017, and what characterized that experience was in fact its genuinely international, intercultural atmosphere – we had all these photos of classrooms from around the world...



... and all these teachers interacting with each other and sharing insights across time and space boundaries – it was a pretty amazing feeling to help bring people together like that, in a big professional space. Another aspect is that I deliberately wanted to promote a certain valuing of the expertise of teachers and teacher educators in local contexts internationally (I'm thinking also of Paula's and Amol's wider work here, but also of the way insights developed in the Champion Teachers programme in Chile have been serving as a good basis for work in India and Nepal recently). And, finally, and most importantly perhaps, I wanted to advocate for teacher-research - and a particular view that teacher-research is feasible and useful if presented in the right way. Showing it as a worldwide 'movement' was a good way to do that.

Can you say a bit more about that particular motivation to portray teacher-research as a movement - where did that come from?

I've been quite frustrated about academic co-option of teacher-research / academic pronouncements about it, as I've expressed in a few places. But I was also annoyed by some quite prevalent statements that action research is good in theory but nobody engages in it. And I thought that we need more examples of teachers actually engaging in teacher-research – to provide a riposte to the critics and enable more teachers to feel inspired to engage in teacher-research. I think it has started to come across as more like a movement than the rather disparate individual efforts there were before - usually being undertaken in relatively privileged situations - that were apparent till recently. Of course this has been strengthened by the comparatively large-scale projects which have been started up in e.g. Chile, India, and Peru.

Part of it was probably also to gain maximum publicity and impact for certain events and publications I was involved in in the ESRC impact initiative (they were sponsoring it after all) - but I hope people feel we kept a broad and eclectic remit to promote whatever was going on e.g. Exploratory Practice events in Buenos Aires and Rio; Action Research (Australia); general 'teacher-research' conferences, as well as Exploratory Action Research. Overall, we thought the whole would probably be much greater than the sum of the parts.

Also, finally, another idea behind the Festival was that it could provide a basis for some genuinely international publications - we've had the TR! conference and subsequent publications in Istanbul for a number of years, although that mainly attracts Turkish teachers, and now we're beginning to see publications from other parts of the world, such as [Teaching in low-resource classrooms: voices of experience](#) (India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh) and [Champion Teachers: stories of exploratory action research](#) (Chile). But something more international would be desirable.



So what kind of festival events have taken place so far, and where?

Well, the festival started at the IATEFL Conference in Glasgow in April 2017 with a [Symposium on Teacher-](#)

[research for Difficult Circumstances](#). Various teacher-research mentoring projects were reported on in that, including the [AINET](#) Teacher Research Project (Nepal and India), [Champion Teachers](#) project (Chile), and the collaborative teacher association research project within [CAMELTA](#) (Cameroon). Each of these projects demonstrates how teacher-research can be an empowering means of addressing difficult circumstances including large class size, lack of physical resources, and so on. The symposium and several of these projects themselves were the University of Warwick '[Teacher-research for difficult circumstances](#)' impact initiative. Also in April, some of the participants from the TESOL International Association Electronic Village Online (EVO) on '[Classroom-based research for professional development](#)' made [online presentations](#) of teacher-research they had carried out as a result of taking part in the EVO. I think what these presentations clearly demonstrate is how teacher-research really is possible even for teachers in quite difficult and internationally diverse circumstances.

In May, the festival focused on events in Latin America. In Buenos Aires, there was a workshop [Acting for Understanding: Exploratory Practice](#) for student-teachers and members of APIBA (Association of English teachers in Buenos Aires, and this was followed by the second annual Latin American Conference for Teacher-research in ELT - [Teachers Research! Buenos Aires 2017](#) Another workshop - [Exploratory Action Research for professional development](#) - was held in La Plata with teachers, student-teachers and members of staff associated with the Instituto Superior de Formación Docente N° 97 de La Plata (Escuela Normal 3).



Then in June, there was the [Teachers Research!](#) Conference in Istanbul, the third of its kind to be held in Turkey. In July, the festival was back in Latin America, in Rio de Janeiro for a [discussion on](#)

[Exploratory Practice](#) and [symposium on Exploratory Practice](#). Also in July, the IATEFL Research SIG organised and sponsored [an online conversation](#) around new books showcasing and discussing teacher-research.

In September, the festival reached Nagpur, India with the first [AINET International Teacher Research Conference](#). And this was closely followed by a workshop in Assam - [Introduction to Exploratory Action Research in ELT](#).

And the final festival event for September was held in Adelaide, Australia – the 8th [Action Research in ELICOS Colloquium](#).



Actually, the titles of some of these events may sound rather grandiose, but what's important to stress is that they were all designed to encourage, involve, guide and empower teachers, and in some cases even student-teachers, to investigate their own practices and classrooms, and to show that it is possible for any classroom teacher to do that. They were mostly very teacher-friendly events with lots of poster presentations, interaction and colour!

That's quite an impressive array of events, and certainly international. So, how did you manage to organize them all? What kind of support did you have?

Well, as I said, the Festival was a kind of 'umbrella' for different events which had their own local organizers. So, for example, organization of the [Teachers Research! Buenos Aires 2017 conference](#) was led by Dario Banegas in Argentina, and this was preceded by a workshop organized by the Buenos Aires English Teachers' Association, APIBA. The conference in September in India was organized by another teacher association, AINET, and the University of Gauhati followed that up with an invitation to deliver a workshop on Exploratory Action Research. Again, that was locally organized, though expenses were supported by IATEFL's Teacher Development SIG, topped up from a research project grant I'd received from the ESRC (UK). That grant also helped me get some clerical assistance

for coordination of the Festival. Then, there was a [steering committee](#) made up of local organizers, sponsors and our Honorary President, David Nunan.

And, are there any plans for the festival to continue in 2018?

Well, originally we were thinking that the festival would end around September 2017. However, it took on a bit of a life of its own so some people thought it should go on indefinitely. We eventually decided to pull the plug on it, at least temporarily and end on a high note with the [2018 EVO for 'Classroom-based research for professional development'](#), a [webinar by Emily Edwards](#) and – possibly (though this is not confirmed at the time of writing) an event in India in March and an online discussion.



Just to go back to your earlier comment about how it is possible for any classroom teacher to investigate their own practice. What would you say to a teacher who has no idea about research?

To begin with, you could learn more about teacher-research by browsing the Festival web-pages, and perhaps watching some of the teacher poster presentations. It's also valuable to have a more experienced mentor or friend to help you get started and help you along the way, but you could equally well form a self-help support group with like-minded colleagues. We tried to build up a set of resources – including [online introductory material](#) – on our website to help teachers new to teacher-research. And you can learn a lot by reading [reports by teachers](#) themselves. You could join the next [Electronic Village Online \(EVO\) on classroom-based research for professional development](#) and receive some mentoring at a distance and/or you can work your way through the materials from this year's EVO, on the same website.

And finally, what for you have been the main achievements or successes of the festival?

The existence of the Festival website which we constructed to share information about events and video-presentations, posters, and so on, means that outputs are now available to a much wider audience, in particular to teachers in developing countries, who may not otherwise have access to professional development opportunities of this kind. This website was frequently

highlighted in the Teachers Research! Facebook group as well as via IATEFL Research SIG, British Council TeachingEnglish and other media. Also, a major aim of our activity was to bring together teacher-researchers around the world and help build a sense of a global ELT teacher-research community, and I think the Festival has contributed considerably to that aim.

What I really hope is that people might remember the Festival in the future, and everything the Research SIG's done over the past five or so years as a turning-point, where teacher-research gained legitimacy as something so-called 'ordinary' teachers can do even in difficult circumstances, in fact a way to begin to address such circumstances in a positive manner!



Biodata

Richard Smith (<http://www.warwick.ac.uk/richardcsmith>) is a Reader in ELT and Applied Linguistics at the University of Warwick. He has coordinated ELT research capacity-building projects in the UK and India, and is academic adviser to several teacher-research mentoring schemes in Latin America and South Asia, including the British Council Nepal Aptis Action Research Mentoring Scheme. His recent relevant co-authored or co-edited publications include [Teachers Research!](#) and [Developing Insights into Teacher-research](#) (both, published by IATEFL), and [Champion Teachers: Stories of Exploratory Action Research](#), [Teaching in Low-resource Classrooms: Voices of Experience](#) and [A Handbook for Exploratory Action Research](#) (all three of these for the British Council).

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Reviews of publications

Puzzling over Exploratory Practice: a review of Hanks, J. (2017) *Exploratory Practice in Language Teaching: puzzling about principles and practices*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

By Sabine Mendes Lima Moura

Judith Hanks' *Exploratory Practice in Language Teaching: Puzzling about principles and practices* presents an approachable insider's view on the experiences of Exploratory Practice (EP) practitioners around the world, undertaking the important task of comparing, contrasting, organizing, and classifying the available knowledge on the field. As the author herself explains, EP is a "form of practitioner research in which learners as well as teachers are encouraged to investigate their own learning/teaching practices, while concurrently practicing the target language" (p. 2). In this publication, Hanks, an EP practitioner herself, remains true to EP's vocation of integrating teaching, learning, and research through lived experience.

In doing so, she resorts to a highly dialogic writing style. My view is that the book could be read as a reference guide, a collection of practical resources, and/or an inspirational narrative, with most of its sections arising from investigative questions (cf. puzzles). Readers are invited to adopt a "more eclectic approach to reading" by choosing "where to start, where to pick up, and where to leave-off" (p. 18), according to their different concerns. Hanks' work meets the general objective of including "not only language learners, but also teachers, teacher educators, educational psychologists, and researchers who engage in EP" (p. 8). It offers an analytical compilation of historical background, conceptual framework, reports, case studies, and personal accounts of EP. The book's organization favours pedagogic use, including text boxes that not only highlight concepts, but also include quotes and vignettes deemed to be especially insightful in each of its sections. Definitions within EP are expanded, reworded, and complemented throughout the text, mirroring EP's process of working for the understanding of its puzzles.

The book could also be understood as the collegial manifest for a subversive approach to knowledge construction, since it includes practitioners' voices from various walks of life and cultural backgrounds "on equal footing" (p. 11) with the author's narratives and analyses. Thus, it challenges presupposed authorial hierarchies, echoing Hanks' own history of publications, which