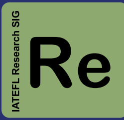

DEVELOPING AS AN EFL RESEARCHER:

Stories from the field

Edited by
Siân Etherington
and Mark Daubney

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Finally, we wish to acknowledge the hard work of those presenters who opted to turn their posters into papers and who embarked with the editors on another journey of discovery towards the publication of this book. Thank you for your support throughout the process.

Siân Etherington and Mark Daubney

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Introduction

Siân Etherington

This introduction first aims to capture something of the vibrant, enthusiastic and friendly atmosphere of the 2015 IATEFL ReSIG Pre-Conference Event which was the stimulus for the papers presented below. A short outline of each paper follows, organized in the three strands from the day. Finally, there is a short personal reflection on the day's events.

ReSIG Pre-Conference Event 2015: Developing as a researcher

The Research Special Interest Group (ReSIG) Pre-Conference Event of the 2015 IATEFL conference took place on Friday 10th April. This book represents a selection of papers developed from posters presented at the meeting. It is hoped that this publication will do some justice to the interactive, convivial and exciting nature of the day. The sense of community established between participants was something very special to those attending, and it is that spirit– alongside the content of the discussions and ideas presented – which we as editors attempt to capture in the publication of these papers.

The title of the event was 'Developing as a researcher' and the aim of the day was to bring together different participants' experiences of their personal journeys of evolution as researchers. The format of the day consisted of poster presentations, rather than full papers, allowing participants to be more flexible in their approach and for greater discussion of ideas and issues across the group as a whole.

The call for posters was deliberately open, asking for stories of personal growth, puzzles, issues and questions around becoming a researcher in TESOL/EFL area. In response came a wealth of proposals from the field, representing a range of researchers of differing backgrounds, experience, focus and concern. Three strands of interest were identified:

- **Strand 1:** A researcher's journey: Challenges, issues and strategies (8 posters)
- **Strand 2:** Specific methods and specific challenges (7 posters)
- **Strand 3:** Identities, roles, relationships and contexts in research (7 posters)

On the sunny, warm (well, for Manchester in April!) morning of the PCE, ReSIG delegates arrived at the Manchester Conference Centre ready

to participate in a full and stimulating day of reflection on and discussion about the development of EFL researchers. The bright and spacious room was set out with circles of chairs and delegates were encouraged to join a group as they came in. Posters were displayed around the room making for a vibrant and colourful atmosphere. A short period of introductions and icebreakers set the welcoming and inclusive tone for the day.

Each strand of posters was introduced with a fifteen-minute 'impulse' talk given by an invited discussant. The talks highlighted key ideas and interest points from each group. ReSIG is very grateful to the respected members of the EFL research community who agreed to take on this role. Strand One was initiated by Professor David Nunan, Strand Two by Dr. Sue Garton, and Strand Three by Professor Cynthia White. The impulse talks led into short individual poster presentations (5 minutes per poster), following which delegates had the opportunity to read and discuss posters with the presenters and engage in general and lively discussion around the themes. In this period presenters were able to expand on their experiences and thinking in interaction with other delegates.

The final part of the day was a panel discussion of key themes emerging from the strands, ending with a determination to continue the sense of community forged through the event. Research, particularly within social sciences and the humanities, is very often a solitary and demanding endeavour. Sharing stories and experiences with other researchers brings realization that one is not alone in the challenges and difficulties faced; talking together helps solve our problems or at least minimize their impact. And it's not always only about the difficulties we face: conversations about the joys and excitements of the research process are also too often missing from conferences or researcher interactions. Discussion of process as well as product is of great benefit to all in finding new, creative, and innovative ways to develop our research skills and push forward in our explorations.

It is this kind of community building which is at the heart of ReSIG's aims as an organization. We are an international community of EFL researchers who offer a warm welcome to anyone who is interested in this area. It is an active SIG, running online discussions of research papers, hosting online research resources and organizing research training and development workshops and teacher research conferences. We have an annual newsletter featuring work by members and news of our activities. If you're reading this book and not already a member, please join us! http://resig.weebly.com/join-us.html

Introduction to the papers

Strand 1. A researcher's journey: Challenges, issues and strategies

David Nunan: **Impulse speaker** • In his paper David Nunan recounts the shocking experience which led him to become a researcher of his own practice, and thus became the foundation of a long and distinguished research career. His story drew gasps from the PCE audience as the central event was narrated. Not all of us have such a frightening happening in our own histories, but the impulse to look more closely at what we do in our classrooms and how our learners experience this, is one which is familiar to many, if not most, educational researchers. Happily, this event ended well, at least for one of the participants, but it is a salutary reminder of the tensions that exist in all classrooms and how looking more closely may show us things that we might not wish to dwell on. Having the courage to examine these aspects of our practice is one of the key initial steps in becoming a classroom researcher. The papers which follow all feature researchers' courageous investigations of and reflections on their developing understandings of themselves and their practice.

Irena Meštrović Štajduhar: **The growing pains of a young researcher**
In her paper Irena Stajduhar focuses on identity development of the researcher and likens this to the growth of a child, moving through the stages of 'the infant', 'the schoolgirl', 'the teenager', and 'the young adult'. As in childhood, each of these stages brings with it moments of wonder and excitement, mixed with challenge, tension and upset; some more easily dealt with than others. She considers in particular the emotional and affective aspects of being a researcher and offers useful advice on how to cope with these challenges.

Becky Steven: **My research journey: ripples in a big pond**
Becky Steven describes key moments in her research journey through the metaphor of ripples running across a pond's surface; each one spreads beyond its small beginnings to have greater impact than imagined. She tells her story of becoming a researcher through her work on a research project and how this led to greater confidence and expertise. Her paper is threaded through with useful tips from herself and peers about the research process.

Assia Slimani-Rolls: **Using Exploratory Practice to Develop Teacher Research** • The focus of this paper is a teacher-development project using exploratory practice (EP). Exploratory Practice (Allwright and Hanks 2009) is a form of research utilising existing classroom procedures as methods for teacher investigation of puzzles and problems arising from their practice. The project here involved six teacher-researchers as participants. The paper outlines the issues and challenges faced within a long-term project, while emphasising the teacher-researcher enthusiasm and engagement with EP as an approach. This paper has clear links to those of Susan Dawson and Miller and Braga in Strand 3 who also use EP as the basis of their investigations.

Alexia Piaggio: **My Journey as a Researcher** • Alexia Piaggio provides a frank and honest account of her journey through the difficult terrain of a MA research degree. She discusses the challenges she faced throughout various stages of her research, including managing different and contradictory roles in the classroom; developing a sense of the literature in the area; acquiring research skills, particularly academic writing; and dealing with inconsistent and disappointing results. Many of these aspects of the research process are not mentioned in research publications, where results are overwhelmingly the main focus. Thus, this open discussion of these issues is particularly valuable for those inside the research process, dealing with similar obstacles. Providing acknowledgment of such challenges is an important service for other researchers.

Strand 2: Specific methods and specific challenges

Dr. Sue Garton: **Impulse Speaker** • In her paper Dr. Garton discusses challenges she has faced in conducting qualitative research in different contexts. These include research in international contexts where approaches to ethics may differ; the acceptance of certain types of research in the face of more traditional approaches; establishing and maintaining beneficial relationships between researcher and participants. Despite the messy and unpredictable nature of qualitative data, Sue counsels researchers to remain open to the complex nature of this work and the exciting insights which can arise. Uncertainty and tension are key themes for subsequent papers within the strand.

Volha Arkhipenka: **Writing for research purposes: Crossing the love-hate line** • Volha Arkhipenka's paper sets out her experiences of learning

to write- and learning to love writing – during her PhD study. The ambivalent nature of the researcher's relationship to this key aspect of the research process is captured in this account. The paper provides a valuable case study of a developing writer across several stages of PhD work and discusses how researchers can tackle their own anxieties about writing.

Siân Etherington: **Mess and method: researching other people's realities** · In this paper Siân Etherington seeks to address two related dilemmas for many TESOL researchers. One is how to capture the 'messy' nature of classroom realities in research; the other how to stay true to the details of participants' lived experiences in research's (perhaps necessarily) somewhat reductivist portrayal of their 'data'.

Daniel Xerri and Stephanie Xerri Agius: **A shared research journey**
Daniel and Stephanie write of their joint research journey as partners both in 'research and in life'. They discuss how they deal with challenges such as co-authoring a research paper or co-presenting at conferences, as well as conveying the pleasures of working closely with someone you know well. Overall, their paper offers a fascinating insight into collaborative research work within a particular and personal dynamic.

Strand 3: Identities, roles, relationships and contexts in research

Strand 3 was introduced by Professor Cynthia White of Massey University, New Zealand. Her paper considers research as an affective, as well as cognitive, act and from this stand-point focuses on the more emotional aspects of researchers' lives, their developing identities, and the key relationships within the processes of research. The question of the emotions raised by research is present in all the papers following within the strand. Professor White also considers the nature of researcher learning and how this can be supported.

Tien Minh Mai: **What dilemmas have I faced as a researcher?**
Tien Minh Mai attended the conference as an IATEFL scholarship winner. His paper is subtitled 'A narrative of a practitioner who was going to give up his second professional life' and it documents the tensions between his life as a classroom teacher and as an EFL researcher. One of

the key moments he discusses occurred at the PCE event itself, allowing him to feel more fully part of a community of EFL researchers with shared passions and puzzles.

Mark Daubney: **The role of tensions, constraints, and opportunities in shaping researcher identity** · Mark Daubney's paper reveals how his research interests were first triggered by his own emotional experiences as an L2 learner, and how these subsequently impacted on his own thinking as a teacher. He then explores how questioning the prevailing methodological paradigm of language anxiety research led him to seek out ways of resolving tensions and overcoming constraints in his own context, and how opportunities to both further his research and strengthen his identity as a researcher arose from the dynamic interplay of these factors.

Susanna Schwab: **From the novice EFL teacher to teacher educator to researcher** · Susanna writes about her journey of discovery through the EFL landscape from beginner teacher to researcher. Reflection and exploration are key themes in her story. The intertwined nature of research and practice, as each activity informs and strengthens the other, is clear to see in this piece.

Susan Dawson: **On wearing two hats: 'EAP teacher' and 'doctoral researcher'** · Susan Dawson's paper describes the moments of self-doubt she faced as PhD researcher using exploratory practice within her own EAP classroom. The complex tensions between her dual roles as teacher and researcher are explored with care and reflection on a 'crunch' moment in her research provides thought-provoking insights into practitioner research.

Inés K. Miller and Walewska G. Braga: **Why is it so complex to balance trust, autonomy and control? Challenges faced in a teacher education programme** · Miller and Braga's paper also describes work within an exploratory practice (EP) context; here the focus is the reconstruction of one teacher educator's identity (Walewska) as she works with trainee teachers within an initial teacher education project in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil. Exploratory practice is used to investigate the development of the relationships between mentor and trainee teachers and to puzzle out the questions of trust, control and autonomy involved in this setting.

Conclusion

On a final personal note, I would like to add my own impression of the PCE day. Key to this is the sense of a growing community of researchers coming together to discuss matters and ideas close to their hearts. There was a strong feeling of inclusion, as researchers from many different backgrounds, roles and levels of experience shared their stories and journeys, puzzles and challenges. It was encouraging to hear from many of the authors that the discussions around their posters provided support, encouragement and recognition of the importance of talking about these dilemmas and challenges. Where research seeks only to present the final product of findings and conclusions, the process and interesting questions about the process become occluded or lost. The PCE day allowed researchers to reflect on their processes and learn from each other. All delegates came to the end of the day feeling a stronger part of a wider EFL research community.

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Allwright, D., & Hanks, J. (2009). *The developing language learner: An introduction to exploratory practice*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Note: Digital links to poster presentations

In order to provide a full sense of the nature of the PCE event, we have included, at the start of papers, a link to a video of the poster presentation given by each author. These short poster presentations of approximately 5 minutes set the context for the longer paper which follows.

In order to view the poster presentation, click on the 'Watch online' icon and this will open the YouTube video of the presentation in a separate window in your browser.

In order to aid navigation through the book, there is a 'Contents' icon at the end of each paper. Clicking on this icon, or the word below, will take you back to the Contents page.

1

A researcher's journey: Challenges, issues and strategies

Impulse paper: The beginning of a researcher's journey

David Nunan

https://goo.gl/AdH73r

My life as a researcher had its genesis suddenly and unexpectedly in a brief but memorable incident that occurred during my first few months as a teacher in the early 1970s. I had been appointed to a tough inner-city boys' high school with a high proportion of immigrant students. Here is how I described the incident in the introduction to a collection of my selected works (Nunan, 2013: 2-3).

> One of the most insubordinate and troublesome students in [my home] class was a large Yugoslavian boy named Bruno. One day, driven to the limits of my endurance, I had the school secretary send an official notice to his parents warning of suspension if his behavior did not improve. The following morning, halfway through the second period, the door to my classroom was flung open, and a giant of a man strode into the room. Grabbing Bruno by the throat, he hauled him out of his seat and growled, "Me Father! Me fix!" Then, with an almighty swing of his hand, he sent Bruno flying across the room. He hit the wall, and ended up in a crumpled heap on the floor, where he lay, fetus-like, his arms curled around his head. He stayed that way until his father strode out of the room. For the rest of the day, and most of the next, Bruno was very silent. For the first time, he obeyed directions, if somewhat sulkily.
>
> Then something happened that brought about a radical shift in my attitude towards teaching, towards my role as a teacher, and towards the view I had of my learners. At the end of class Bruno lingered behind as the rest of the students gathered their bags and left the room. Then, as I was bending down to stuff my books into my bag, he came up behind me, produced a knife, and stabbed me. Then he dropped the knife and fled from the classroom.
>
> Even though the stabbing turned out to be superficial, doing more damage to my sweater and shirt than it did to me, it sent me into shock. I picked up the knife – it was one of those small paring knives with a sharp point – and put it on the desk. Then I sat down. I started to shake all over.
>
> My first thought, once I determined that the stab wound did not require stitches, was that I needed to report the incident. But instead of heading to the front office, I continued to sit at my desk with my head in my hands. What was I doing at this school? What good was I to these adolescents who were destined to be factory-floor fodder?

> Instead of reporting Bruno for what was undoubtedly a serious infraction, and one that should have landed him in juvenile court, I decided to find out what made him tick. Not surprisingly he failed to turn up for class the following day, and Friday, but did show up on Monday. He avoided any eye contact with me, kept his head down, and appeared to be doing his work. At the end of the lesson, as he was leaving the room, I touched his arm and asked him to stay behind.
>
> At first, he was truculently silent, but when it became clear that I had no intention having him punished for what was a serious offense, he began to relax. We sat down on opposite sides of a desk, and he began to give me a window on his world.
>
> He was born in a small town on the Adriatic Coast. He and his family had migrated to Australia four years previously. His father worked in a factory in Botany, an industrial suburb close to the airport. His mother was a hospital cleaner. His older brothers also worked. He and his sister were still at school. His father wanted them to leave school and get jobs so that they could contribute to the family income. His mother, on the other hand, wanted them to go as far as they could with their education. This was obviously a source of conflict within the family. His father solved family conflict with his fists.
>
> "And what do you want to do?" I asked.
>
> "I want to be a doctor," he said. This brutish looking boy who was disruptive and aggressive. Who beat up other boys. Who took a knife to his teacher. He wanted to be a doctor? "But I never will," he said. And then he hung his head. Defeated at fourteen.

As I said in the book, I owed Bruno a debt of gratitude because he taught me probably the most important lesson I ever learned as a teacher, that unless I knew what made my learners 'tick', then I had little chance of providing them with the educational opportunities they deserved. Over time, I restructured my entire approach to what I did in the classroom, making connections between what they learners already knew and what they needed to learn to be successful, building bridges between their lives beyond the schoolyard and what we did in class. I began haphazardly, and soon realized that I needed research skills. This led me back to the academy. I've spent the last forty-five years shuttling back and forth between academia and the classroom. At the moment, I'm spending time working with six to twelve year old children in Vietnam and Korea, and what they have to teach me is astonishing. So, thank you Bruno!

Reference

Nunan, D. (2013). *Learner-Centered English Language Education: The Selected Works of David Nunan*. World Library of Educationalists Series. New York: Routledge.

Contents

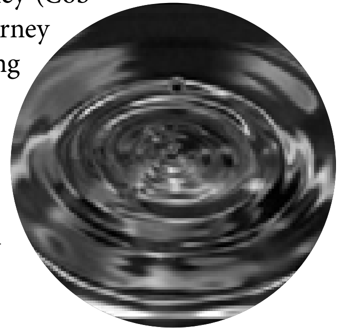
My research journey: ripples in a big pond

Becky Steven

https://goo.gl/0KjRJJ

Key words: Share, share, share – as far and wide as possible. Keep saying 'yes'. Know you're not alone.

My research journey has had a much wider impact than I could ever have imagined, and the ripples continue to extend further and deeper. I'd heard that research isn't for teachers, that we're too busy teaching and that there's no funding for 'time out' to reflect and write up our research (Burns, 2010). Yet it is possible! My colleague Jessica Cobley and I embarked on the 2013 Action Research in English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) programme in Australia with our project about using web 2.0 technology to improve our students' speaking fluency (Cobley & Steven, 2014). I'd like to share my research journey to encourage others who may have their own 'burning questions' (Burns, 2010).



In preparing for my 2015 IATEFL ReSIG PCE poster presentation, I also turned to my peers for their useful tips to help support you on your own research journey. You will find these interspersed amongst these pages.

Getting started

Your research has profound effects beyond your own inner sphere of influence. My action research journey began when I stumbled across some glossy new books in the Education section at the University library. Borrowing them on a whim, I thumbed through and discovered that we teachers' efforts to resolve our everyday quandaries is action research, and how we can, should, *must* share our findings with our peers. Not only that, these books encouraged us to expand our efforts to share beyond our staff rooms with the wider community.

Somehow, however, I never quite got the momentum together to make it all happen until Jessica and I came across the English Australia/Cambridge English Action Research in ELICOS programme in 2013. English Australia is the professional association for over 100 member language

centres that offer ELICOS in Australia. The English Australia/Cambridge English Action Research in ELICOS programme has supported teachers working in ELICOS since 2010. The programme is run by Professor Ann Burns and the English Australia Professional Support and Development officer, and provides a means by which teachers can have training, take time out to reflect and record their findings, along with funding from Cambridge English Language Assessment to dive in and give it a go. There is also an opportunity to present our action research projects at an action research forum at the annual English Australia conference, as well as to publish an article in an issue of Cambridge Research Notes.

We wanted to explore how we could develop our students' speaking fluency using web 2.0 technologies. My colleague was confident with IT, while I was mostly self-taught and rather tentative. There is no denying that finding the impetus to take your research further can be difficult, but thankfully programmes such as this gives us the time, know-how and space to pursue our quest.

Fast forward to 2015 and here I am presenting at the 2015 Manchester IATEFL ReSIG PCE. I am confident using IT, keen to expand my newfound skills even further, and a much more reflective teacher. I was humbled and gratified when we won the English Australia Action Research in ELICOS 2013 national award for our project. This helped us to attend the 2014 IATEFL ReSIG PCE with our first poster presentation on our research project alongside other participants from the programme: an Aussie contingent! We also presented a 30-minute talk at the 2015 Manchester IATEFL conference based on our action research project.

'How do I know my research is any good?' (Jessica, 2013 Action Research in ELICOS participant)

In speaking with my colleagues, other 2013 Action Research in ELICOS programme participants, as well as the 2014 and 2015 IATEFL ReSIG PCE participants, something that seems to resonate with all of us is having self-doubts about the worth of our research. Despite winning an award for our research, even we still had our doubts, but when Jessica asked Donald Freeman at the 2014 ReSIG PCE "How do I know my research is any good?" he advised, '*You know your research is good as long as it has theories behind it.*'

'Look beyond the norms: try looking at other fields for answers- like forensic science!' (Becky and Jessica, 2013 Action Research in ELICOS participants)

During our action research project, we participants had been encouraged by Professor Ann Burns to review the literature in the early stages of our projects, and indeed Jessica and I turned to fields as diverse as forensic science for answers to our 'burning questions' by adapting the use of 'impromptu speeches' to support our students' fluency development in our project (Williams et al. 1993). We knew we had a good solid grounding for our action research project, and Donald's words resonated and encouraged us to feel confident in our project and its findings.

The importance of thorough planning and grounding of your project was also a key theme amongst the tips I included on my poster at the 2015 Manchester IATEFL ReSIG PCE:

> *'Keep a* ***journal****....think* ***outside the box****....know you will often* ***question*** *yourself and your research journey...***be open** *to suggestions and critique (Heila, English Australia TOEFL grant recipient 2014)*
>
> *'Enjoy the* ***process****- it's what mindful teachers do!' (Angie, 2013 Action Research in ELICOS programme participant)*
>
> *'Plan thoroughly, be observant, and reflect, reflect, reflect- the deeper the better' (Jessica and Becky, 2013 Action Research in ELICOS participants)*

Our research has had impacts and influences beyond my own personal journey from technophobe to digital literate. Closest to home, one of the main highlights of participating in our action research project was seeing our students' excitement at discovering how they could use technology to improve and reflect on their own speaking fluency more deeply. Another highlight was realising that our research has also inspired other teachers around us to start using some of the technology in their classes. One of our colleagues took up a research project of her own by successfully applying for an English Australia TOEFL grant in 2014 because she was inspired by our work. This was my first realisation that sharing is key to furthering research in others. We also presented at the 2013 English Australia conference, and I discovered later that a teacher in another state had embarked on the 2014 Action Research in ELICOS programme after speaking to me about our experiences following our presentation.

Suddenly I find myself a 'go to' person. Teachers have always approached me with questions about teaching, but now it is about applying for grants,

using IT, their own research projects, and I am being asked to check their proposals and applications.

Spreading the word: Don't waste your time writing articles that will be rejected – find out what the editors want (English Australia journal editor)

Our research was published in a Cambridge English Language Assessment's Research Notes (Issue 56, May 2014) as part of the English Australia action research in ELICOS programme. We have also been approached by editors present at the 2013 English Australia annual conference who saw our presentation and invited us to publish articles and reviews for the 'English Australia' journal. We now find ourselves being cited and/or shared by others on their websites, blogs, and articles. In relation to publishing, the best pearl of wisdom I've found on my journey comes straight from an editor:

> *'there is nothing more frustrating than having to turn down articles someone has taken the time and trouble to write because it's not what we needed. I'd prefer to discuss what we need with them directly, and how the writer could write to that'.*

When I shared this with the 2015 ReSIG PCE group during my poster presentation, several people approached me afterwards to comment on how this had resonated with them and how they could see that a more consultative approach with the publishers may be more effective. I hope this will be a useful tip for those wanting to publish in future: talk to an editor first!

Lifelong learning: does the journey ever end?

For someone new to sharing their classroom action research experiences, it is very heartening to know that there is a growing global community of support out there which is keen to share with you, and have you share with them. David Nunan mentioned at the 2015 IATEFL ReSIG PCE that as a researcher you can 'feel so alone', but thankfully we can turn to our peers and peer groups, making the journey less isolating. We now have well-established programmes available to us such as the English Australia Action Research in ELICOS programme, and also the Cambridge English Language Assessment/English UK Action Research Award Scheme now established in the UK. We also have the international Special Interest Groups as peer support groups, such as IATEFL's ReSIG, and I have found its members most welcoming, and a wealth of knowledge and support.

And so the journey continues, destination unknown: as opportunities arise out of the blue from unexpected corners of the globe, I find myself brave enough now to keep saying 'yes' to them. Whoever said the journey was going to stop, anyway? I wonder why I thought that 'finishing' the project and winning the award was the final destination? I read recently an interesting comment on action research: 'Action research assumes teacher development involves lifelong learning in changing and multidimensional contexts' (Pine, 2009). Lifelong learning indeed! I wish you every success on your journey. Where will it take us next?

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Contents

The growing pains of a young[1] researcher

Irena Meštrović Štajduhar

https://goo.gl/imK0I3

Introduction

The research process is demanding: it requires discipline, time, the desire to learn, the readiness to continuously develop one's skills, the ability to cope with uncertainty, and the willingness to critically question one's work. Given the myriad of choices in terms of epistemological and methodological assumptions, research methods, data collection, and data analysis tools, the sheer practical requirements and decision-making can at times be overwhelming, which is why many researchers have written comprehensively about the how-to's of *doing* research.

And yet, the affective dynamics of *being* a researcher seem not to have been discussed as openly and extensively. The relationship between a researcher and his or her work can be as significant as the knowledge and skills one possesses. In other words, what is inextricably linked with the research process is how people position – and reposition – themselves in relation to their research, not only cognitively, but also emotionally. The fluctuating nature of this relationship brings yet another dimension to the intricacies of what we call research.

Currently in the midst of working on my PhD research project, I have been actively reflecting on the meaning and process of research, and especially on myself as a researcher. In doing so, I have come to understand that research has become an integral part of my being, meaning that my professional development is inseparable from personal development. With this paper I hope to contribute to raising awareness of the dynamics of this personal aspect by outlining the stages I have undergone to date as a researcher: *the infant*, *the schoolgirl*, *the teenager*, and *the young adult*. I would like to emphasise that these stages are not intended to imply linearity. For me, there has been no clear start and end point of each stage and the thoughts and feelings from the chronologically earlier phases feed into the current one(s), helping me reconstruct my understanding and move forward in my thinking.

The Infant

This chronologically first developmental stage was characterised by the tension between teaching and research. In the context of higher education

1 "Young" refers to early-stage researchers, but it is my hope that some of the aspects I discuss here might resonate with the more experienced researchers as well.

in which I work the dichotomy between the two tends to be emphasised, frequently in favour of doing research. Given that I primarily see myself as a teacher, I constantly felt the struggle between my two roles: teaching is what I chose to do, and a PhD is what I am obliged to do. At this point I only had a very vague idea of what embarking on a research journey might entail, but my initial attitude toward it was unenthusiastic.

Another inner conflict present at the time had to do with acknowledging personal limitations. Even though my motivation was not at a very high point, I still had high expectations of myself. I wanted to start my project immediately, *in medias res*, come up with questions for the participants, collect data, and analyse the results "here and now". I was impatient, headstrong, concerning myself with the nuts and bolts before I even had a research aim – dealing with the *how* before defining the *why*.

The Schoolgirl

Luckily, fairly soon I met my supervisor and mentor, Sarah Mercer, who continues to be the pivotal figure in my development. While attending her classes, I realised that there does not need to be a disconnection between teaching and research, and that one does not have to opt for one or the other. I also began to grasp the complexity and multifacetedness of research: one cannot simply jump in; it requires comprehensive studying, reading, thinking and skills development in order to make informed decisions. Despite the very clear motivational jump and sparked curiosity, I still had a misconception in my mind that there was a finite set of content to be learned about research and if I studied relevant sources, I would know exactly what to do.

The Teenager

This oversimplification was quite efficiently dispelled when I attended my first doctoral colloquium, which I would deem the crucial formative experience for me as a researcher. This was the first time I had the opportunity to communicate with peers who had quite a different starting point than I did: many of them are writing their theses not because they had to, but because they wanted to. Inspired by their experiences, I finally genuinely connected with my topic and realised what it means to engage with the topic and spend time critically considering the central constructs.

This particular stage was heavily emotionally charged: at the same time I was inspired, but also felt desperate. One moment I was making plans on how to proceed with my project; at another, I was doubting my abilities, wondering "Can I do this? Do I even want to?" This is when I started mindfully observing my inner turmoil, and began accepting it as a part of the process.

The Young Adult

During a period of maternity leave, I managed to achieve some distance from my research – physically, mentally and emotionally. Spending this time away from has proved invaluable because when I was ready to engage with my project again, I instantly observed a more mature approach in my thinking and a healthy respect for research as a process. Patience, time-management and the new sense of confidence in relation to my topic have been dominant in this current stage. Nevertheless, I have also been coping with relapses to the teenager stage, but have found that every such instance helps me progress.

Final Thoughts

These experiences have helped me realise that being immersed in a research project can include a very complex affective aspect. By embracing this constant flux without judgement, I believe that one can invaluably enrich the subjective reality of doing research.

It is my hope that this story will help reassure researchers that they are not alone in carrying the burden of internal struggles. Many of us become overwhelmed from time to time by the commonly-cited mantra to wake up, lay down, dream about, eat and live with our research projects. In those moments it is helpful to remember that, in order to function well, we need to be kind to ourselves. It is perfectly acceptable to take a couple of days away from your research without feeling guilty about it. Even a smallest amount of distance is likely to help you recharge your batteries and perhaps even some realisations about how your project might come to fruition.

Having a strong support system within a group of your peers is important, because they are the ones who will understand you best; but remember also to nurture friendships with people outside the academic community. Sometimes the stress of deadlines, funding, and publishing requirements becomes so overpowering that we forget to enjoy our work. Our friends who are not burdened by the nuts and bolts of the academic world are those who can help us put things into perspective and remind us to enjoy life.

To round off, I would like to mention two ideas about research that have left a strong impression on me. I heard the first of these ideas several years ago, when I first entered the academic world: 'Research is a lonely endeavour'. And while I have learnt that, in many ways, this may be true, I have also learnt that it does not have to be so. The second idea, heard fairly recently from Jean-Marc Dewaele, captures the aspect that tends to slip our minds too easily: Research should be fun! However demanding the day-to-day becomes, it is worthwhile reminding yourself of this every now and then.

Contents

Using exploratory practice to develop teacher research

Assia Slimani-Rolls

https://goo.gl/SsNMRM

Introduction

In 2013, the Institute of Languages and Culture was created from the merger of two language units: the English language service provider and the Foreign Languages and Cross Cultural Studies Department. One of the roles of this new Institute is to extend its programme portfolio and enhance its research and professional development activity. Given that the ultimate aim of the Institute is to provide students with a successful experience of learning languages, the development of language teacher research (TR) as continuous professional development (CPD) was put forward to enable teachers to engage with research in order to understand better their professional context. This engagement is assumed to have the "potential to be a powerful transformative force in the work and professional development of language teachers" (Borg 2010: 391). For example, Slimani-Rolls and Kiely (2014) also found this to be the case when they investigated TR as CPD with staff from Business Management Studies.

A workshop was organised for the Institute staff (June 2014) around a poster presentation session led by teacher researchers who had previously reported on their work via posters at the IATEFL Conference SIG Teacher Research (April 2014). The aim of this activity was to introduce TR via the friendlier mode of posters presented by teachers with similar professional lives. The instigator of the project and author of this text took this opportunity to present the principled framework of Exploratory Practice (EP), which is a form of practitioner research designed to enable teachers to develop a better understanding of their classroom practice (Allwright & Luenzen 1997, Allwright 2003, Gieve & Miller 2006, Allwright & Hanks 2009). EP encourages teachers to reflect on their classroom lives by identifying teaching puzzles which appear to aid teaching and learning as in 'why doesn't group work proceed the way I planned it? (Slimani-Rolls 2003), 'why are particular communicative tasks recommended to be used in the classroom'? (Slimani-Rolls 2005) or 'why don't the students engage with my teaching'? (Slimani-Rolls & Kiely 2014). See also Hanks 2016 for learner puzzle investigation in an English for academic purposes programme.

EP has put forward a set of principles to guide teachers in their quest for understanding their learning and teaching environment. First and foremost, EP prioritises quality of life in the classroom because it paves the way to qual-

ity of work (Gieve & Miller 2006). Because EP is particularly concerned with closing the gap between research and practice, it proposes that teachers work alongside their learners as co-partners using potentially exploitable pedagogic activities (PEPAs) such as pair and group work, class discussion, brainstorming sessions and so on as investigative tools so that research becomes an integral part of teaching and manageable within their regular classroom sessions as well as sustainable over time. The EP framework is commonly referred to by its advocates as ethical and inclusive because of its participatory nature which calls for learner inclusivity and collegiality with all concerned – learner, teacher, researcher and when necessary academic manager- to work together for their mutual understanding and development.

Following the June 2014 workshop, volunteers were invited to join a two year long research project (2014-2016) in order to investigate the feasibility of integrating research into their teaching routine following the principles of EP. Six teachers responded: three teachers of English and one each of French, Italian and Spanish. A workshop, which was specifically designed for these participants, took place in mid-September 2014 to enlighten them further on EP as a form of practitioner research, its principles and objectives. EP-based studies (Rowland 2011, Zhang 2004) were presented by the research leader and discussed by the participants to illustrate puzzle identification and investigation via PEPAs and the rational behind the collaborative work by the teacher and the learner as partners to enable the integration of research into pedagogy. Moreover, the group agreed to establish their working procedures as reported below to enhance collegiality and support their needs to progress their understanding of their respective puzzles.

Challenges, Issues and Strategies

An Institute research audit revealed that, apart from limited and dissimilar research clusters in scope and in depth, the majority of the staff was not research active. The socio-academic context of this TR project conforms to many, if not most, of the barriers to TR that Borg has identified (2010:409). Some of these limitations are lack of clear structure and direction to guide teacher research, teachers' awareness, beliefs, skills and knowledge about research, concerns that an interest in research takes teachers' attention away from their primary role as teachers, view of research as an academic, technically difficult and time-consuming activity and teachers' different contractual terms to name but a few. To address some of these impediments, the present author, project investigator and research leader, acted also as a mentor to provide structure to the project as well as guide the research development of all six participants. She established, as reported below, a number of strategies to support the participants to become researchers of their own classroom environment.

Peer Observation of Teaching (POT)

POT is used regularly in the Institute to enhance staffs' professionalism. Because of its inherent attributes of developmental intent, self-selection of peers, and collaborative process, the research leader suggested that the project participants use it as a stepping-stone to identify and/or discuss their puzzles without interrupting their teaching routine, notwithstanding that some had already identified their puzzle following the June or September 2014 workshops. So the POT was brought to the teachers' attention to provide further opportunities to enhance collegiality and support amongst the participants, who also videotaped their lessons to enable them to view their teaching in their own time.

A series of interactive workshops

The research leader made herself available for individual consultancy, but the participants remained at the heart of this process-oriented enterprise because they worked on their own agenda rather than following a pre-established schedule. They focused on their own particular puzzles derived from their personal concerns regarding the use of the mother tongue in the classroom; the disruptive use of mobile phones during instructional processes; the lack of the learners' interest paid to teacher written feedback; the search for developing better teaching skills to enable learner oral fluency; the need to obtain meaningful learner feedback and evaluation of the student learning experience and enquiries about why particular activities worked better than others in the classroom.

However, in order to bring the group members together, enable them to benefit from each other's experiences and the wealth of knowledge that is exchanged during the individual sessions, the research leader made, with their permission, some of their questions, issues, apprehensions and understandings the focus of regular workshops and group discussions, which took place twice a term, at least, during the first year of the project (2014-2015). It would have been difficult, in any case, to have more group meetings because the participants worked on different teaching schedules and trying to bring them together could be quite strenuous. Nevertheless, the forum enabled the participants to put in perspective their progress and/or difficulties. To energise them further, the project leader invited an external expert, Professor Richard Kiely, to share his views on the on-going work, contribute to the discussion on the puzzle elucidation and elaboration on the teachers' questions and suggestions about their own and their peers' teaching concerns. All of this was aimed at providing further support to the idea that the participants' work was important, not only to the University, but also to the wider academic community; thus instilling further belief in and impetus to their research efforts to remain on task.

Teachers' beliefs and perceptions of research

The participants' discussion of their actions revealed some "inappropriate or unrealistic notions of the kind of inquiry teacher research involves" (Borg 2009:377). Indeed, one collected vast amounts of data via videotaped teaching sessions, which would be impossible to view and analyse in any meaningful way given their teaching schedules. Another, interested in the impact of the use of mobiles on the learners' behaviour in the classroom, had videotaped a lesson without any mobile in sight; a second lesson with mobiles that students had on their desk but were not allowed to use; and a final lesson with mobiles that students were allowed to use. This suggested that their beliefs and perceptions of research were rooted in the quantitative tradition of large-scale research echoing the use of positivist methods. All participants expressed doubts about the choice of their puzzle as a research project. They repeatedly enquired, with the team leader, whether they had enough data and had done enough research to establish a deep understanding of their puzzle (Garton 2015), suggesting that it was hard for them to accept the effectiveness of small-scale and local research. However, the regular take-up of individual discussions with the mentor, as well as the group's contributions of ideas to elucidate the puzzles, which opened ways to understanding their teaching concerns acted gradually as a catalyst for individuals to take their work seriously and believe in what they could achieve as researchers of their own environment.

Time Constraints

Between mid-September and mid-December 2014, only a few participants consulted individually the research leader on their project, making her feel that there was perhaps a communication breakdown. As a result, she organised a meeting entitled, "Why don't the participants interact with the research leader?" with the intent of reaffirming the objectives of the project to allow the participants to share, prior to the Christmas holiday, any issues that might have hindered their work. This question, however, came as a surprise to them, leading to assurances that they had simply been busy with their regular teaching activities, but that they were continuing to reflect on and 'gather data' to elucidate their puzzles. Reassured that the participants were still on the task, the research leader asked participants to respond in writing, by mid-January 2015, to a set of reflective questions about whether their involvement in the research project and various individual and group discussions with their mentor, the external guest researcher, their peers and learners responded to what they expected from the project and whether they had noticed any change in their attitudes towards their teaching and learners. The aim of these questions was to ensure that the

participants remained attentive to their classroom routines so their reflective processes were maintained. Their written reflections would also enable the participants as well as the research leader to follow the development of the teachers' thinking as they progressed towards the elucidation of their puzzles and to enable the research leader to highlight any emerging leads that could be used to shape future group discussions. Given that the teachers were in the early stages of the project, it is possible that the introduction of any initiative was felt as an interruption and time-consuming addition to their established routine. Hence, the mentor grew to be patient and learned to operate within the teachers' working circumstances.

Conclusion

Despite the scarcity of time due to the demands of their teaching environment, the participants never missed any group discussion or consultancy appointment. By the time the author reported to the IATEFL SIG teacher research (April 2015), the six participants were still on task and enthusiastic about embarking on the second year of their research journey. The investigation in which the research leader is currently involved is to make sense of what has kept the teachers on track and encouraged them to maintain their efforts in the face of the challenges of 'having' to use their normal classroom activities as research instruments and view the learners as co-partners in the research enterprise. She senses much impact from the creative collaborations which have led to a renewed respect for and trust in teachers working together with other teachers and researchers, and teachers working alongside learners – all tapping into the potential of unforeseen opportunities created by EP's call for inclusivity and collegiality. These are only some of the notions which might frame the mutual understandings and development that teachers, learners, the internal and guest researchers have reached from taking action to develop a better understanding of their classroom practice.

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Contents

My journey as a researcher

L. Alexia Piaggio

https://goo.gl/SNq9Xe

Travelling is invariably a pathway of learning – regardless of the starting point, the route or the final destination. As a journey to knowledge, the texture, nature and extent of any understanding reached through research is both subjective and objective. Indeed, it depends as much on individual sensitivity as on the events one is exposed to.

When I embarked on my MA degree, little did I realise the length, breadth or width of the pathway ahead. In actual fact, going from observational practice in the Certificate, to literature reviewing in the Diploma, to classroom-based action research in the dissertation module presented a range of rather dramatic scenery-changes, featuring steep inclines, sweeping plains and the occasional patch of thorny bush-land.

Inclines, both up- and down-hill, were such challenges as juggling double, even triple, classroom roles; tackling coherence and exercising intellectual honesty before inconsistent data. The sweeping plains were such tasks as tool development or efficient data retrieval, while seeking permission to perform classroom-based research were my thorny bush-land.

Here are some of the more salient events that marked this research journey, all of which contributed to my development and growth as a researcher:

1. Managing multiple roles and contradictory assumptions in research in progress

With reference to managing multiple roles, EFL classroom research does not simply entail data crunching and note-taking. In this field, researchers often have to double up as teachers, teaching assistants, teacher trainers, even language facilitators and walking, talking learning props. Interestingly, awareness of this occurrence is not necessarily a given. At first I struggled to identify each role, and later to decide if/when to step into or out of each and thereafter if/when and how to implement support strategies. A case in point was my choice to use video/audio recordings to help ensure data-collection continuity during role-change-induced lapses. Ultimately, peer discussion led to the realization that, as a reasonably expectable occurrence, colleagues might well have valuable suggestions to make and advice to share.

Where contradictory assumptions are concerned, I found it quite difficult to counter the role that others (i.e. colleagues, learners, even head

teachers) were pushing me into and stay focused on the objectives of my project work. Again, a case in point was providing feedback, where I sometimes realised that involved parties assumed I was there to observe and judge them or their work. Clearly, since providing "non evaluative, supportive, timely and specific" feedback (Shute, 2008:153) was neither within my scope of work nor an easy task, this aspect sometimes turned out to be somewhat of an issue – one that, as better expressed through Robert Frost's poem: *two roads diverged in a yellow wood, and sorry I could not travel both and be one traveller* – I intentionally chose to shelve.

2. Understanding of the role of the Literature Review

Generally speaking, compiling a Literature Review is a bit like working in what might be defined as a *vacuum*, with no framework of live and meaningful research onto and against which assumptions, hypotheses and prospects can be pegged and measured. For me, this was at once the haziest and most stimulating part of the journey. On the one hand, I struggled with finding my bearings and navigating the troubled waters of conflicting data of varying degrees of relevance. On the other, the project triggered what was essentially a trial-and-error approach to critical thinking and reflective practice. Admittedly, the process was somewhat facilitated by revisiting existing models – especially peer-produced assignments by earlier cohorts on the same degree – which provided a set of much-needed guidelines yet sufficient leeway to explore alternative routes into my chosen topic. On a pragmatic scale, I learnt the importance of flexibility, systematic data management, and keeping a research journal.

3. Acquiring and mastering support skills

Progressing through research consistently requires specific skills, such as, for instance, the efficient compiling and updating of bibliographical references, the meaningful management of data (including the storage, retrieval, crunching, analysis and interpretation thereof) and the ability to produce written discourse that is both register-relevant and appropriate. Indeed, there were several instances throughout my study-travel, when a stop became inevitable. Overall, despite initial perceptions, timeout rarely was a total setback, as with the intensive, eight-week scientific writing workshop I undertook during the dissertation module. Indeed, half way through the course, when I actually started writing, the process suddenly picked up speed again – possibly powered by fledgling skills and newly kindled enthusiasm. Clearly, the workshop came with the pains and joys of drafting and redrafting script, exercising collaborative-criticism and – most challenging for me – handling clarification. With

reference to the latter, going forward implied grasping the fact that what was clear to me might not be so to others and that multiple-viewpoints and angles should be given due consideration. Therefore, my on-going concern is to ensure that any painstakingly acquired skills, comparable to expensive, high-tech tools in a cutting-edge tool-kit, be valued as such, and therefore looked after appropriately and used extensively in future research processes.

4. Exercising intellectual honesty in the face of data inconsistency

With data collection, cleaning and crunching in place and the writing process under way, the next challenge – possibly the greatest so far – was exercising intellectual honesty in the face of inconsistent and inconclusive data. Indeed, realising that, although inherently valuable, my work ultimately failed to provide conclusive or definitive answers, was at once disconcerting and baffling. Moreover, having no extra time to address the issue implied finding a way ahead that excluded fabrication. Past research journal entries and tutor-led discussion paved the way to reflective practice that, once decanted and distilled into painstakingly crafted words and paragraphs, was included in my dissertation. From feedback by the supervisory panel, it transpired that discussing mistakes and failure openly makes neither for bad research nor for incompetent researchers, but rather for honest, reflective practice.

5. Handling dissatisfaction with final results

Finally, once all is said and done, how does one deal with that peculiarly subtle yearning that inevitably goes with finishing any significant project-work? In my case, the so-called *wanderlust* feeling was a degree of dissatisfaction in the face of inconclusive research results and outcomes. Indeed, not only intended in terms of righting past wrongs and correcting foregone mistakes, it was more the case of going the extra mile – regardless of direction. Hence, bearing in mind that research rarely yields final answers, that even the clearest of data are open to multiple interpretations and that researchers seldom end up in the exact same place they had originally anticipated, the answer to research would appear to be further research.

So, concluding, with an MA TESOL under my belt and a quiver full of newly acquired skills stashed in my backpack, I am now – metaphorically speaking – standing at a crossroads under a multi-arrow signpost pointing to different options: a research doctorate, a PhD programme, or perhaps an Ed.D? Again, should I go for the taught or distance option, the full or part-time course? Perhaps, once again, the idea is that although my travels

through knowledge so far have led me far and wide, the point lies more in the actual travelling than in the arriving and that I look forward to the next steps in the journey.

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Specific methods and specific challenges

Impulse paper: Specific methods and specific challenges

Sue Garton

https://goo.gl/xyYsUo

At the end of his impulse session on 'A researchers' journey: Challenges, issues and strategies', David Nunan mentioned the messiness of research and the challenges that presents. At the same time, the posters that were presented at the PCE event also drew attention to, either directly or indirectly, a number of challenges that the presenters had faced in their own research. These are my starting points in talking about specific methods and specific challenges in research.

In what follows I will talk about the specific challenges of doing qualitative research, because that is where my experience lies, and it is precisely the messiness and complexity of much qualitative research that can appear to be so daunting, especially to a novice researcher. This messiness means that a tolerance of unpredictability is important. I firmly believe that qualitative research in English language teaching will always yield interesting findings, even if they are not what were expected. As long as the data are approached with an open mind, they will open up new and unexpected avenues. Therefore, complexity and messiness also represent an opportunity and are what makes qualitative research so exciting.

Doing qualitative research raises many questions, but ultimately, the answers can only come from the researcher her/himself. This is because each research context, each research participant and each research process is unique so the answers to the questions will depend on such considerations as the purpose of the research, who it involves, who it is for and what it aims to achieve. Therefore, even if experienced researchers are unlikely to be able to give answers, what they can do is share their experiences and the ways in which they overcame the challenges they faced.

One particular challenge I have faced is working in international contexts, where understandings of research and of the research process may be different. One example of this is in the area of ethics. While conducting research ethically should never be in question, conflicting demands in obtaining ethical approval may be a challenge. For example, a British institution may require signed consent forms that are not considered appropriate or even permissible in the research context. How researchers have dealt with such situations and other ethical dilemmas is the focus of the chapters in DeCosta (2015).

Another challenge raised in the posters concerns classroom-based research, and in particular what is accepted. Action Research (see, for example, Burns 2009) and Exploratory Practice (see, for example, Allwright, 2003) are two of perhaps the most common forms of classroom-based research and both are considered to be extremely beneficial both to those who carry them out and those who read their accounts of their research. And yet they are often considered second class research and it becomes difficult to publish them, at least through traditional channels. The challenge, then, is to find new ways to disseminate such research so that it can reach those who would most clearly benefit from reading about it, and I would include not only practitioners but also academic researchers.

The relationship between participant and researcher is also a challenge in qualitative research. In particular, when we present our findings, whose version is it? Whose interpretation counts? Whose results are they? It is important to accept that there is no such thing as neutrality in qualitative research. For example, there is no such thing as a neutral interviewer, especially in ELT where our interviewees are often our colleagues, friends or bosses (see Garton and Copland 2010 for an account of this). One solution to the participant-researcher dilemma is to work as co-researchers. The work of Maria Brisk at Boston College is a good example of teachers and researchers working together, while Pinter and Zanidan (2015) discuss the role of children as co-researchers.

Much closer and genuine collaboration between practitioners and researchers is, I believe, one of the most promising routes to productive and mutually beneficial research relationships in ELT, and also to wider dissemination of research that is of value to both researchers and practitioners.

Finally, there is the challenge of what counts as good data collection, and with this we come a full circle. Data collection is a large part of that messiness and complexity that we started with. My students often ask me 'how many interviews do I need to do?' or 'how many questionnaires do I need?' And my answer is always: as many as you need to be able to say something interesting/useful about your topic or to be able to answer your research question. Qualitative research represents a series of constraints and opportunities and each researcher has to navigate their own way through all the challenges on their own individual research journey. For me, that is what makes qualitative research a challenge, yes, but an immensely rewarding one.

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Mess and method: Researching others' realities

Siân Etherington

https://goo.gl/yAFfZM

Mess and Method: Researching others' realities

Imagine a huge, multi-coloured pile of wool in each corner of a room. Each pile is so big that you could jump right into it like a huge cushion. Different colours and textures of wool intertwine and spiral around each other. A line- or perhaps many lines – from each is snaking over the floor towards me. As the first thread comes into my hands I take up my knitting needles and very slowly, painfully and with many mistakes start to knit the wool together. My knitting is not very good, so there are some areas of over-tension, dropped stitches and holes- and the colours do not come together into the wonderful rainbow I had planned. However, after a period of labour I have a short scarf – something new that I've created from the tangled heaps of threads laid out before me. My feeling is one of relief and some pride at my creation – but I have some questions and some disquiet too. I've changed the threads and tangles into something else; the original has been lost and my ordered, but truncated, output doesn't capture the glorious spirit of the mess and disorder that had existed before.

For me, this is what doing a piece of research can be like. I take up the threads of stories and lives of others and make them into something new of my own. I turn the messiness of those lives into something more regular and organized. I put my own focus and interpretation on the experiences of others and produce an explanation or description from it which they themselves may not recognise.

From this starting point some further questions develop:

- How do we maintain a sense of real life in our research? A sense of messiness? Should we?
- What happens when we impose theoretically informed interpretations on participants' stories? The question 'whose story is it anyway?' has been asked by other researchers too (Pavlenko 2002).

Thinking about life and research we could see the two as contradictory in several ways. Life is messy, unplanned, experienced by individuals, with dynamic, changing and multiple realities existing for people throughout their lives. Research, on the other hand, could be viewed, from a certain

perspective, as ordered, systematic, concerned with representation of some kind, and focusing on single realities. How can we reconcile these two things in the research we produce?

The nature of the research process may also lead to the marginalization of participants. The centrality of the researcher in the research process and the finality of the status of a research report may mean that the voices of the participants become heard only through the researcher's words. As Canagarajah writes,

"Because the subjects exist in the report only through the voice of the researcher, there is a natural tendency for their complexity to be suppressed and their identity to be generalized (or essentialized) to fit the dominant assumptions and theoretical constructs of the researcher and the disciplinary community." (Canagarajah 1996:324)

I explored these questions and dilemmas through the work of several qualitative researchers from the social sciences. Ideas from postmodern approaches to qualitative research indicate that viewing the researcher as 'bricoleur' or kind of 'craft creator', who constructs research using tools and materials that are to hand, is a useful perspective. The act of bricolage creates something from materials which are present, while keeping alive the possibility of other representations or combinations of elements. The work of Ellingson (2013) was particularly thought-provoking for me. She asks that researchers move on from *triangulation* of data, which uses complementary pieces of data to support each other and thus close down possibilities of meaning, to *crystallization* , where connections and meanings are kept more partial and open. She suggests that researchers need to expand their continuum of possible research paradigms to embrace the 'Art-Impressionist'. This lies beyond both the Realist /Post-positivist views of research and what she calls the 'Middle –Ground', essentially an Interpretivist approach encompassing questions regarding understanding and co-construction of personal worlds. The Art-Impressionist stance brings the artistic and creative within research into greater focus; suggesting that one of the outputs of research may be artistic endeavour and that art may be a way of representing the findings of research in a more open and meaningful way. Since our expectations of art envisage more than one interpretation of a work to be possible and that each viewer or user of art will bring and take away something different from the experience, framing research in this way allows the messiness of our research areas and the voices of the research participants to remain more present in our outputs.

So, how might the Art –Impressionist stance and TESOL research interact? Within EFL/ TESOL research there has been a recent rise in the

use of narrative approaches as methodology (e.g. Barkhuzien *et al* 2014). However, others have taken this further, moving to more deliberate crafting of research outputs as art. Nelson (2011) for example has written poems, plays and short story fiction as ways of representing her research. Her view is that narrative accounts of research can serve to democratize the knowledge making process by including a much wider range of voices and experiences in a deliberately non-academic representation. Such artworks make research more creative and also more inclusive through 'grass roots knowledge work' (p.470).

This brings me back to my opening dilemmas. Can research capture messiness? Can research keep the voice of participants central, clearly heard and unimpeded by academic 'rigour' in writing? I think the possibilities discussed by Nelson and Ellingson provide some answers, although they are clear challenges in implementation. Nelson herself recognizes the issues relating to tensions between implicit, open meanings and the 'academic 'wish for more explicit and authoritative answers. The act of fictionalizing itself may also be seen as a move away from the mess of real life, through 'narrative smoothing' (p. 476) and re-storying.

However, as the HE academy itself moves towards alternative ways of conceptualizing research (for example, current PhDs in creative practice disciplines now include performance, art, fiction as major elements) it is possible that more space is opening up for this sort of approach. The necessity of showing 'impact' of research within the UK HE research evaluation framework has also brought more artistic representations of research into being (e.g. an impact project for stem cell research used children's milk teeth to build a tooth fairy palace for display in galleries and public spaces http://www.theguardian.com/education/2011/oct/10/childrens-teeth-stem-cell-research). It will be interesting to see how such moves further influence discipline areas outside the creative arts.

I concluded my poster by posing two questions for participants:

- What story could you craft about our experiences today?
- What art could you make?

If I had been braver or more artistically confident, I would have tried to present the poster itself as a piece of art. Indeed I have attempted this in the opening section of this paper. My aim for the poster was to provoke some thinking in participants about my dilemmas and to resolve my own thinking around these long-held questions. I think I achieved one of these aims, in that PCE participants were enthused to discuss these ideas with me. As for the second aim, I feel I have reconfirmed for myself that, in the spirit of

art and creation, opening up a question does not need to lead to immediate or clear-cut answers: a state of continual interpretation is a valuable and acceptable place to be.

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Writing for research purposes: Crossing the love-hate line

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https://goo.gl/SRzZ3T

Being a researcher involves doing a lot of writing. In fact, as Bolker (1998: 3) says, "to do research is to inquire, to dig one's way into a problem, and writing is one of the best tools available for such work". Here I tell the story of how I came to agree with this view and started to love writing after a long time of finding it challenging.

The story

The prelude

In March 2013, I was teaching English in Istanbul, Turkey. Even though I enjoyed what I was doing, I thought that what I really wanted to do was research. I decided to continue my studies at PhD level and was thrilled to learn that I was offered a place at the University of Manchester. Having resigned from my teaching job, I headed to the UK. I was full of optimism, even though I had been told before that a PhD was not an easy endeavor. The academic year began and the more it progressed, the more requests including some sort of writing I was receiving. Writing was something that I never enjoyed and always struggled with. So, the requests to write overwhelmed me and by the end of the year I started to feel like I was holding a bomb of writing in my hands. I did manage, though, to finish the year alive.

Reading for pleasure

Once the year was over and I took a month out for a holiday to recover from all the stresses that I had been through, writing was the very last thing I wanted to think about. Surprisingly, it was then that the process of transformation began. Not being able to even think about my research, but having nothing else to do, I returned to my longstanding hobby and started again to read for pleasure. This time, however, I did not read in Russian – my native language – but in English. There was no specific reason behind my decision to read in English. It just happened that at that time what I wanted to read was science fiction originally published in English and I just hoped that my knowledge of language was already good enough to allow me to handle literature of such sort without translation. As it turns out I was right. I was indeed able to read and understand what I was reading hardly ever referring to

the dictionary. The satisfaction that I felt about myself as a learner of English was, however, not the only outcome of this process.

An unexpected benefit

Another outcome, which took me some time to notice, was further development of my language skills. Even though developing the language skills was not a part of my intent for reading, my command of English improved significantly as a result of this process. I did learn some new vocabulary, though not much, as there were not many words that I did not know in what I read. More importantly, I seemed to have gotten accustomed to the flow of English speech with such a flow getting imprinted somewhere in the back of my mind. I noticed it when sometime later I started a diary and attempted to write my records in English. The whole process of writing seemed to have become more natural. Each time I started a sentence I had a feeling for what might be the best ending for it in terms of its linguistic form. This feeling was new for me and was not something I could explain. I just felt when a sentence was too long or two words did not work as a phrase or some synonym was a better match for what I wanted to say.

Experimenting with writing

Starting a diary not only turned out to be something that helped me to notice the improvement in my language skills, but also a step in my development as a writer. Feeling no pressure to produce a polished text, I was pouring words on paper. While my improved language skills helped me to formulate better phrases and sentences, linguistic form was not actually what I was thinking about as I was writing. As the diary was private, I allowed myself not to be perfect and instead was playing and experimenting with the language. This gave me a sense of ownership for the language and liberty to use it as I wished. This also made me realize for the first time that writing could be easy and it could be fun. When I later returned back to academic writing, I brought this new feeling about language and writing with me. Though it felt strange at first not to feel terrified by the very idea of writing and instead to play freely with words, phrases and sentences as I was producing an academic text, I soon got accustomed to this new way of being.

Going digital

When I had just started my PhD I wrote very little– only when there was an absolute need for it – and when I did I often did so by hand. When I returned back after the summer of reading science fiction in English and keeping a diary I felt much better about writing and I started to write more. It was then

that I realized that going digital suited me better. I was never complimented on my handwriting and I could clearly see why. All of my writing was messy, despite my hand aching as a result of trying to put all the letters in a straight line. As a person obsessed with order, I could not but want to disown what I had produced. Moreover, I found that while writing by hand I was focusing too much on neatness. While typing however, I felt that the appearance of my writing was being dealt with on my behalf and I did not need to worry about it. This let me focus fully on the ideas that I actually wanted to develop.

Computer housekeeping

As I started to keep notes for my PhD digitally, I soon also realized that it was important for me to keep my records in order, having struggled a few times to find a particular note on my computer. Having done some research online, I found that there were software programmes and applications to help with this. The one that I found particularly useful was Scrivener, a programme designed for novel writers that allows large amounts of texts to be managed effectively within one document. For my PhD, I created one Scrivener document and was putting all of my disjointed notes, thoughts and reflections into it in the form of separate 'novel' chapters. The side bar with the titles of all the chapters helped me later to navigate easily among everything that I had written.

The value of writing for thinking

In relation to qualitative data analysis, Gibbs (2007: 25) says, "Writing is thinking. It is natural to believe that you need to be clear in your mind what you are trying to express first before you can write it down. However, most of the time the opposite is true". Through my experience with writing, I came to fully agree with this and even to believe that this was true for other forms of writing. As I kept writing I noticed that I could go much further in my thinking if I were writing than if I were not, regardless of what exactly I was writing, be it notes on my PhD readings, reflections on data generation process, early drafts of the thesis or my private diary.

The limitations of human memory

But the main surprise waited for me later. It came about when some time after having started to write more for my PhD I was working on my theoretical framework and was writing an early draft of it for my thesis. By then I had read quite a lot about narrative inquiry – the theoretical framework that I had chosen to adopt – and written many notes about it. I, however, did not even think of looking at those notes when I just started to draft the chapter as I felt absolutely certain that I remembered everything I had read and

thought. There were so many ideas in my head that I could not possibly imagine that they were just a small portion of what my mind had been through and what it had produced. I realized how wrong I was only when, looking for some quote, I accidentally started reading through my notes. Stunned, I kept mumbling "Did I read it?", "Did I think it?" and "This is exactly the idea that I need!" as I was reading.

Putting new skills and understandings into practice

This experience left an indelible impression on me. Already feeling generally much better about writing, I now wanted to cling onto it tightly, seeing it as the only way of keeping thoughts and ideas safe. I was writing vigorously for my PhD hoping to avoid having to do the same work twice, which I would have certainly had to do if the ideas and thoughts kept getting lost. Only six months later I saw significant progress in my research and the truth in Bolker's words (1998). Indeed, writing did help me to dig my way into my research problem.

Developing a writing routine

Over this period of time, I also developed my writing routine and came to agree with Bolker (1998) on one more issue, which is, in fact, the central argument of her book: regularity in writing is more important for progress in research than the total amount of time invested in it. For me, regular means every day at my designated place, which is my desk at my home, starting right after breakfast whenever it is possible and keeping writing for at least three 'clean' hours with 'clean' being the actual time of full concentration that I spend on writing. "I write only when inspiration strikes. Fortunately it strikes every morning at nine o'clock sharp," said W. Somerset Maugham and it is the same with how I proceed with my PhD.

Final Reflections

As a writer, I am still in the process of development, but these days I do enjoy writing much more than I used to. Reflecting on my story, I think that this is because:

- Reading literature in my field helped me to get a better understanding of what to write about;
- Reading fiction literature in English helped me to develop language skills;
- Accepting myself as a person who hates writing by hand helped me to stop fighting myself and start playing to my strengths;
- Sorting my writing tools out helped me to bring order to my writing and become more productive;

- Trying writing regularly helped me to see the value of writing for myself and finally cross the love-hate line in relation to writing for the research purposes.

Response from the audience

When I shared my story at the IATEFL ReSIG Pre-Conference Event, I received very positive responses from the audience. There was a lot of agreement that writing is central to the process of research and, thus, needs to be discussed more.

After the presentation during the discussion time, quite a few members of the audience approached me in private and confined that they also found writing difficult. They thanked me for speaking up on the issue and encouraged me to do some work and may be even publish about writing for researchers.

Finally, my experience with reading for pleasure attracted special interest. EAP teachers who were present in the audience remembered observing that those of their students who enjoyed reading and read a lot, be it even in their native language, did indeed tend to write better. It was acknowledged, though, that this evidence was anecdotal and a suggestion was made to do further research.

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A shared research journey

Stephanie Xerri Agius and Daniel Xerri

https://goo.gl/yMVtjY

Introduction

The metaphor of the journey is often invoked when describing research (Midgley, Trimmer, & Davies, 2013). A journey suggests change as opposed to stasis and it is assumed that when one conducts research one not only instigates change in the outside world but experiences change within oneself. Despite having been criticized for the linearity it implies (McCulloch, 2013), the journey metaphor for research is lauded for the transformation it leads to:

> Researchers-as-voyagers travel from familiar inner and outer landscapes into unknown territories with new horizons. They progress through an itinerary of developing meanings, both epistemological and ontological. Researchers-as-voyagers are engaged in a process of becoming, and of discovering a voice. The 'voyage' tenders experimental possibilities for alternative understandings of who they are, who they could be and what they know. It opens up transitional spaces for the formation of a new sense of identity. (Batchelor & Di Napoli, 2006, p. 13)

Just as the research journey is described as bountiful for those who embark on it, it is also typified as an experience replete with isolation:

> The research path that one takes on never promises to be easy and although many will accompany the researcher and many more will give support, one also has to realize that he or she cannot escape from the feeling of loneliness and the surfacing array of doubts here and there that one encounters. (De Levay, 2013, p. 32)

This brief article highlights some of the advantages and challenges of sharing one's research journey. As partners in research and life, we have benefited from our distinct kind of collaboration but we have also faced and overcome a number of difficulties in order to ensure that each of our own particular ambitions have come to fruition. We illustrate some of the things we have learnt while working together on research projects, conference presentations, and journal articles. It highlights some of the achievements that were made possible through our shared research journey but it

also demonstrates how, along the way we have had to overcome challenges that have tested much more than the strength of our research partnership.

Developing as Researchers

Our shared research journey commenced at university during our undergraduate studies. We grew accustomed to structured days of studying, attending lectures, preparing for examinations, and writing a dissertation. This continued during our postgraduate studies (reading for an MA in English and a PGCE in ELT). As soon as we started teaching, we read for an MEd in Applied Linguistics part-time. Once we got married, this meant juggling work, study and domestic responsibilities.

Following parallel academic paths means being able to discuss research methodology and research topics at length. This also allows us to voice concerns and offer each other suggestions on how to resolve issues. The shared journey provides us with intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation to conduct research. For example, our development as researchers involves jointly researching our classrooms. The fact that we teach the same subject and are interested in similar research areas enables us to collaborate on research. This has provided us with more opportunities for classroom research, which means we pool our resources when co-authoring papers and co-presenting. At times, there is also a sense of healthy competition between us because of different views on how to undertake research.

Co-authoring a Paper

When considering an area of interest, we reflect on the best approach and methodology to research the area. We decide who will be responsible for what part of the research study. We collaborate on gathering and analyzing the data. This work is divided between us, but not necessarily equally. Once this process is completed we decide who is going to be the lead author and begin drafting the paper, each one of us being responsible for specific sections. We review each other's work, provide constructive feedback, and engage in revisions.

Co-authoring a paper entails negotiating roles and responsibilities. It also demands being more self-disciplined in adhering to deadlines whilst taking into account other personal commitments. Whilst we provide each other with encouragement when collaborating together on a writing project, joint publication also teaches perseverance, patience, and sensitivity when critiquing one another's contributions. In this, being partners in life can be both advantageous and a drawback. The former because we have grown accustomed to voicing our opinions freely,

and the latter because we have to be careful not to cause resentment and conflict. Co-authoring has also enabled us to capitalise on each other's strengths and address specific flaws.

Co-presenting at Conferences

The possibility of attending and co-presenting at the same conferences is a bonus as it means partaking in the same continuing professional development (CPD) experiences. This is due to the fact that we share the same academic background and similar research interests, which means that when searching for conferences online we know exactly which type of events interest us. If we come across a conference we think we could both benefit from, we consider whether it would be possible for both of us to attend and sometimes co-present.

Similar to co-authoring, co-presenting has taught us the importance of negotiation and decision-making. For instance, this involves dividing the presentation time, deciding who is to lead the presentation, and who is to present which sections. Being partners in life allows us to negotiate when and how to work on a presentation. The convenience of working so closely together from our home facilitates the process.

Benefits and Challenges

The benefits of a shared research journey include: working in a highly supportive environment; a sense of discipline in adhering to schedules; and the possibility to study and write even during holidays and at weekends as there is mutual understanding and fewer distractions. Throughout the years we have developed our respective research interests and sharpened our foci; sharing these with each other means that we learn jointly. For example, in relation to methodology we have discovered and researched different types of research design, which we have learned about either through our shared collaborations or through our discussions of how we have used different methods for our individual research. This meant exploring both qualitative and quantitative methods and developing our individual strengths whilst counteracting particular weaknesses.

The challenges include: time constraints; managing different responsibilities and personal commitments; reaching a compromise; and switching roles between being life partners and researchers. At times, the tension between life and research commitments tests the strength of our personal and research partnership. The type and degree of challenge can result in conflict and difficulty. So the question is, how does one overcome a challenge? It depends on the challenge. If it is something that we both face, then it requires perseverance, joint effort, and the willingness to resolve it.

For example, to overcome the danger of overfamiliarity that such a closely shared research experience might lead to, we have found it important to regularly collaborate with other researchers. If the challenge involves only one of us, then the other person provides support and a willingness to listen and offer advice. The backbone of our research journey is a blend of mutual understanding, continuous support, and equal measures of patience and compassion.

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Identities, roles, relationships and contexts in research

Impulse paper: Identities, roles, relationships and contexts in research

https://goo.gl/1E7Muk

Cynthia J White

Researchers are socially located people, and as such we bring our biographies and subjectivities to every stage of the research process. Yet until recently we have tended to amplify research as a cognitive process, and to underestimate the ways (and degree to which) researchers are affected by a host of complex circumstances (historical, institutional, political, interpersonal, intrapersonal and so on) that shape who they are, their relationships and research contexts. Here I want to focus on three dimensions that are crucial to being and becoming a researcher: firstly identities and roles, secondly relationships and contexts, and thirdly researcher learning.

For some time now we have understood that the term ‘role’ is too narrow a conceptualisation for the work of researchers since it speaks more to knowledge and skills than a wider range of human qualities; research fundamentally engages questions of identity because we invest our biographies and subjectivities as well as our full consciousness and agency in the many tasks that constitute research. More and more we have come to see that there is no entirely neutral or objective researcher (contrary to the prevailing views of some three decades ago) and while we still see references to ‘the role of the researcher’, we probably now understand this to represent a more abstracted view of research processes rather than looking at how those processes are realised and enacted in particular moments. Thus we might see reference to the role of the researcher at the data-gathering stage, but once we see descriptions of researchers in interviews for example, there is likely to be more of a focus on how the interview was conducted, and why; these aspects tend to engage the emic lens of the participants and that inevitably involves questions of identities. We are also more likely now to want to know about such matters as the researcher’s relationship with the research participants, whether they had they known each other before and how, where the interview took place and so on. This leads us on to the next point of relationships and contexts.

Both relationships and contexts (like roles and identities) are dynamic, and therefore conceptualising research in terms of bounded, static relationships and contexts is problematic. Traditionally one of the complexities in research has been seen in terms of negotiating access to research

contexts, especially in more qualitative approaches and most crucially where fieldwork is central to the research. However other important issues arise once that access is granted. For example, as researchers we need to be open to the ways in which contexts and relationships may change when we bring a research lens to them, and the ways in which we can acknowledge that change both during the data-gathering and in representing the research findings. One thing I have learned is to be very open to the ebb and flow of researcher-participant relationships over time, to be sensitive to how much we ask of participants (member checking may, for some participants, be perceived as burdensome, for example) and crucially how we represent our participants: do we, for example, just describe them in terms of demographic information, or do we represent them in more complex terms. Part of our view on this will depend upon the project, the methodologies we are using, and our views of our roles and identities.

A third perspective, not in the title here, is the nature of researcher learning. It is also a useful way to continue to reflect on yourself as a researcher. In my experience it is in critical moments – when the unexpected happens, or something challenging or very rewarding occurs, for example – that I really gain the most from the experience of research. This can take place during data-gathering, when analysing or coding data (an 'aha' moment), in collaborative discussions with a co-researcher, in supervision meetings, or when listening to a presentation ….the contexts are endless. But what I tend to notice is that those moments are generally unplanned and unstructured, and they often arise from seeing and trying to resolve a particular issue or problem. They also tend to take place when interacting with others, in the midst of the everyday messiness and complexities of research relationships, problems and contingencies that we really begin to learn about research, about the research problem we are seeking to understand, and about ourselves as researchers!

In this section of presentations contributors talked about their journey from novice teacher, to teacher educator, to researcher (Susanna Schwab), and about researcher dilemmas (Tien Mai). They also focus on being both a practitioner researcher and a doctoral researcher (Susan Dawson). Identity is central to the contribution on the ways tensions, constraints and opportunities shape researcher identity (Mark Daubney) and the challenges in a teacher education program which entail the complexities of balancing trust, autonomy and control (Ines Miller and Walewska Braga). Each contribution is really also about researcher learning, that is the shuttling between learning about research and learning about yourself as a researcher, which are at the heart of the on-going processes of being and becoming a researcher.

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'What dilemmas have I faced as a researcher?' A narrative of a practitioner who was going to give up his second professional life

Tien Mai

https://goo.gl/ZcZyoS

I'm not a researcher yet, but that's what I've always longed for. Publishing reports of informed practices and contributing to a larger community of English Language Teaching, have, along with being a classroom teacher, been my ultimate goals. Unfortunately, the vivid prospect of achieving such an aim ended in 2011 when I completed my MA degree in Applied Linguistics. Taking that MA course was one of the most bizarre moments of my professional career.

First of all, I have to admit it was peer pressure that influenced my decision to follow a postgraduate programme. I didn't have the exact numbers but by having informal conversations with other teachers, I realized that my undergraduate classmates and my colleagues were doing an equivalent course. Hence, I booked a place on the master-degree bandwagon in Ho Chi Minh City to follow the trend and to achieve some job security. Actually, such a degree might be considered more suitable for lecturers working at tertiary institutions or for teachers wishing to switch to one of these. In Vietnam the standard qualification for secondary teachers does not require a M.A degree. However, I was working at a secondary school where effective classroom practices had to be prioritized.

When the decision had been made, I aimed for a quality research programme which could develop my skills as a researcher. The worst thing that happened was I didn't garner sufficient knowledge regarding available courses that matched my study purposes before enrollment. I assumed that all MA formats were identical, when indeed there are two distinct types, MA coursework and MA research strand. Further, despite some overlapping areas, there were differences between applied linguistics and TESOL. I wished I had been better informed.

So I took an MA course adopting a coursework format. Sadly, I was unable to internalize a systematic understanding of classroom research methods as planned. I remembered my class-based projects on language

play and code-switching did not receive much insightful feedback from the lecturers. Nothing more than the final grade stamp and mass-produced descriptive adjectives on the assignments. Even though I graduated with distinction, I was not confident enough to carry out a full-scale independent research project which I could take pride in. Failing to present or publish my work in a professional conference or regional journal was another setback. If only I had been briefed that a work of quality should be shared with other colleagues, and that speakers at local conferences were not necessarily PhD students or well-known researchers voicing their ideas.

For the past four years, I have made more than one attempt to complete a systematic inquiry; nevertheless, many other obstacles have stood in my way. The first hurdle was my working environment, a bilingual secondary school in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Like most high schools in Vietnam, the institution did not support its teachers in their attempts to carry out long-term research projects, instead focusing heavily on evaluations of teaching performances. In addition, the overwhelming workload of daily teaching almost eclipsed my intentions of looking at my classroom practices in a systematic manner. IELTS preparation, academic skills and Cambridge Checkpoint English classes, all of them constituted 22 hours of teaching per week, plus there were extra hours for covering replacement classes, lesson planning and homework grading.

Another argument against undertaking research in a secondary setting might be attributed to the different nature of researching and teaching. I considered that doing research required a deep analysis of one single problematic aspect of instruction. Spending too much time on a specific investigation might be detrimental to the whole learning and teaching process. Classroom complexities should be responded to immediately, and being immersed in one single aspect might not lead to overall positive learning outcomes. Wasn't it the big picture that matters? In responding to these complexities, the problem could be addressed first by my gut feelings and experience or asking colleagues for support. As I kept wondering about the incentives of completing a research project, I opted to pick up practical ideas from high-profile teaching magazines, blogs or methodology books to seek out solutions. My fixed mindset was 'The days spent on proving the usefulness of a single teaching tip could be better spent on learning ten or more tips from proven teaching resources.' I was anxious when I attempted to initiate a project, asking myself 'Am I reinventing the wheel?', 'Could learners' questions be addressed just by reading published literature?'

Finally, because my context lacked a professional mentor who could help me out with the research procedures and designs, I did not leave my

comfort zone to invest hours in data collection, and the discussion and publication of results of a project whose methods might inherently possess certain limitations.

Such doubts remained until the IATEFL Manchester ReSIG PCE in April 2015. One obvious advantage of joining this participant-based format event was that it has reinvigorated my views of doing research. Initially, my rationale for signing up was to learn from leading researchers and to know them in person. It turned out that the group discussion, poster presentations and follow-up face-to-face conversations challenged my belief in the existence of born researchers. The single word that sticks in my mind must be 'messy'. My eureka moment happened when other group members agreed that a researcher had to go through stages of anxiety and all projects are ongoing and subject to change, an unwelcome but natural part of the research project. It's the determination and passion for sharing and hope for reaching a systematic solution, all of which help to get the tough job done. What could be a greater pleasure for a practitioner-researcher than seeing one's work published, sharing with other colleagues in the field? I really appreciate the ReSIG members' expertise, encouragement and support. And I still believe that doing research is a fulfilling experience in itself. The only way to survive what can be a painful but rewarding non-teaching aspect of being a teacher is to join a community of like-minded professionals like ReSIG.

Thanks to this, I'm now committed to taking on the role of a beginning researcher – my second life.

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The role of tensions, constraints and opportunities in shaping researcher identity

Mark Daubney

https://goo.gl/8RWsku

In my presentation I wanted to highlight some of the tensions and constraints I have experienced and how these have ultimately led to research opportunities – all dynamically connected factors which, in turn, have played a key role in shaping my researcher identity.

The trigger for me to first conduct research arose from own experience of language anxiety (LA) while I was studying for a Master's in Language Didactics at a Portuguese University. This disconcerting emotional experience during my own professional development transformed my thinking on the teaching-learning experience, as well as my own language learning path. This is what Block (2007) refers to as a 'critical experience', a transformative period when an individual's feeling of a stable sense of self is disrupted and attempts are made to discover balance among the disruption. If I experienced LA in second language classroom settings, could it be that my students at that time – future teachers of English, no less – were reluctant to participate in English classes due to feelings of anxiety? I set about investigating this. My findings were revelatory to me. Not only did a significant number of my seemingly self-confident students experience anxiety, but this emotion appeared to be embedded in a web of interconnected factors that involved past learning history, levels of motivation and self-esteem, to name but just a few.

This personal experience, together with my subsequent attempts to conduct research on LA, came relatively late in my teaching career. Working towards the Master's and looking for guidance in the literature, I found research on LA and affective factors was – and still is to a large extent – dominated by references to quantitative research, often based on large-scale studies using questionnaires and statistical analysis. I find this type of research difficult to understand and even more difficult to identify with. This is one of the reasons I have a deeper affinity with qualitative research, which, broadly speaking, is more accessible in terms of reading, foregrounds the voices of participants, and is closer to the concerns of practising teachers. So a rising tension during the initial phase of my research journey was a creeping sense of challenging the prevailing methodological paradigm of LA research and the discomfort this generated – who was I to do this?

Another tension arose from whether it was 'appropriate' – in the papers I presented at conferences or in articles I subsequently published – to disclose how my own experience had shaped my research interests. There was little in the literature that reassured me on this point. But then I found genuine inspiration and courage in Pavlenko's (2005: xi) words which answered her own question on this issue:

'I was guided by my belief that writing about human beings should weave together the personal and the scholarly, the subjective and the objective'. Pavlenko's words not only helped legitimise my self-disclosure, but also demonstrated that researchers' 'voices' in the literature do not, by default, have to be 'distant', more 'objective', 'disembodied' and 'third person', steadfastly avoiding the use of 'the first person'. Here, then, was a way of drawing people into the narrative of research, and one with which I deeply identify.

But having found an area of research that appeared to be of great relevance to my own teaching context, finding colleagues and fellow researchers whose interests dovetailed with mine was not an easy task, and opportunities to genuinely discuss my area of research involved moving beyond departmental, institutional and national boundaries.

I was ploughing a lonely furrow. My investigation into LA experienced by future teachers in their EFL classes was the sole research on LA that had been conducted in Portugal. This was exciting, but also constituted a constraint: with the exception of my Master's and PhD supervisor, I had little opportunity to exchange ideas with colleagues. However, being a member of an interdisciplinary research centre whose central aim was to conduct research on 'identity' encouraged me to reflect on the growing connections I was encountering between the social sciences and the field of second language acquisition and teaching. This was of particular importance as I became increasingly interested in an ethnographic perspective of the classroom. If I wanted to know how learners really felt, why not speak to them and observe their behaviour in the classroom itself as opposed to largely relying on data collected through questionnaires or self-reports?

However, this constraint also morphed into an opportunity. I sometimes sent unsolicited emails off to well-known researchers, asking for their opinion on a particular subject – and I often received considerate and helpful replies. I started attending conferences in other countries which provided me with opportunities to meet and talk with researchers with varying degrees of experience, and we enthusiastically discussed each other's research. Knowing that my research was not only of relevance to the context in which I was working, but also to other settings has given me greater confidence in the value of my work and led to a burgeoning sense

of self in terms of my researcher identity. I was becoming part of a research community, a community of practice, a researcher.

These have been among the most important influences – tensions, constraints and opportunities – that have shaped my identity as a researcher.

I ended my poster presentation by referring to factors that were then uppermost in my mind as I tried to position myself as a researcher. Although I did not explicitly mention Dick Allwright in my presentation (though I did on the poster itself), I found his words 'Where are we at?', used in the 2014 ReSIG PCE event to reflect on practitioner research, useful for my own purposes. Allwright wanted participants to reflect on the degree of progress that had been made by teachers doing research for teachers, and what directions this might take in the future. My final thoughts, therefore, were an attempt to take stock of myself as a researcher, a 'Where am I at today?' reflection, so to speak, drawing on the spirit of Allwright's challenge.

I mentioned the fact that I was considering learning more about quantitative research. I have made the effort to attend conference presentations based on quantitative research projects, and I have found certain aspects to be interesting. Yet I still wrestle with the tensions that come with this effort. A sense of researcher obligation (I *should* know about such research) and the recognition that knowledge allows one to participate more effectively vie with a lack of genuine interest.

I spoke about how a sense of agency is crucial to a researcher. Constraints, tensions and opportunities inevitably shape researcher activity across different settings. My research path is made up of a series of choices influenced by a confluence of factors – some of which I have referred to in this paper. Of course, many others exist – both on a professional and personal level. Perhaps it is the degree to which we are able to successfully negotiate such webs of influence that allows us to strengthen our identity as researchers. Sometimes constraints can quickly change into opportunities, while opportunities may become constraints and sources of tension.

Finally, I also referred to the sense of professional and personal satisfaction and fulfilment that comes with attending such events as those organised by the IATEFL Research Special Interest Group. There is little doubt in my mind that the key to developing as a researcher is to be involved in academic networking, whether this might take place at conferences, seminars or talks, and to be involved in the being and doing of the opportunities that arise from these.

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On wearing two hats: 'Practitioner researcher' and 'doctoral researcher'

Susan Dawson

https://goo.gl/QxoHed

In my poster, I attempted to portray some of the tensions that I experienced while doing inclusive practitioner research, using Exploratory Practice (Allwright & Hanks, 2009; Allwright, 2003, 2005) as both my methodology and pedagogy in a doctoral project, which broadly seeks to examine what happens in the language classroom when English for Academic Purposes (EAP) learners are given the time and space to do learner-research. As David Nunan mentioned at one point in the proceedings, (practitioner) research is often a process of blood, sweat and tears. This struggle was the underlying metaphor for my poster which was subtitled 'Battling it out in the arena', with an artist's impression of the Colosseum arena in the background. Using entries from the journal that I kept throughout the process, I sought to document some of the tensions and conflicts that I experienced throughout the data collection period, which consisted of a 10-week course for EAP learners. Despite having followed the principles of Exploratory Practice (EP) in my classes for several years and feeling fairly comfortable as a practitioner researcher in the classroom, I had naively underestimated the impact that the doctoral nature of the project would have on the process.

Although I firmly believed (based on my own and others' experiences) in the benefits of working within the principles of EP for both myself and my students, I was still plagued by guilt that I was also using the class for my own purposes. After all, I was the one who was hoping to get a doctorate from the experience. This had several effects: a heightened sense of responsibility towards the students in making sure that 'my' research in no way detracted from their learning; a concern bordering on paranoia about what they thought of the classes and whether they were finding them useful or not; and an underlying fear of failing both as a teacher and a researcher by either compromising my beliefs about teaching and learning to meet my research objectives, or by 'missing' research opportunities because of my focus on the learning .

These tensions were manifested in various ways throughout the process. I found myself spending far longer than usual preparing classes and trying to make both the EP work and the skills work 'fit' together into a coherent whole rather than separating them out. This worked better at

times than others, and perhaps I achieved the most complete integration towards the end of the course as I responded to student feedback and my own developing understandings of what was happening. I also became highly sensitised to student opinions and feedback, interpreting any murmurings in the classroom as being directed against myself and the work we were doing together. Although some of my suspicions were completely unfounded, there was one point, when requesting general feedback on the class, that all groups declared 'the puzzle work is not helpful'. This was in week 6 and a pivotal moment in many ways, and one which I have named 'crunch point'. Despite an initial reaction of panic during which I briefly considered stopping the research for ethical reasons (although that would have meant the end of the PhD), I firmly adopted my 'teacher hat' (while still working within the principles of EP) and addressed the issues with the students. Their responses affected the way in which I approached the last weeks of teaching and data collection.

There were also key moments in which I had to make an 'in-the-moment' decision. This is a common day occurrence for teachers and yet the impact of these micro decisions seemed to take on greater significance than ever before. For example, there was one student who I was fascinated by. Despite saying that he felt he was not progressing in understanding his 'puzzle' about reading, I felt he was on an interesting journey. He wondered whether his questions related to reading in his own language too. He then discovered that he enjoyed reading in both languages if the topic was interesting, and then began to puzzle about why not knowing just one word in a paragraph sometimes threw him completely. However, he was adamant there was no point in continuing the EP work, and as he was working alone (for various reasons, including sporadic attendance), I decided to chat to him in class while the others were doing puzzle-related group work. That in-class discussion, which I recorded, and which was almost entirely for research purposes lasted 17 minutes. He concluded that the above were just excuses and actually he was lazy when it came to reading and just needed to get on with it. He felt he had understood his puzzle and opted to help other groups rather than continue with his own work. However, I still shudder at the thought of devoting 17 minutes of class time to one student, effectively ignoring the rest, and wonder if this action contributed in some way to 'crunch point'.

At other times, after 'crunch point' for example, I decided not to record our classroom discussions on why they thought the puzzle work was not helpful because I was concerned that they would feel I was only interested in their feedback because of my research. Because it was a doctoral project, all students had completed consent forms and were well aware of what I

was doing and why. I was keen to minimise the emphasis on myself and my research at a tense time in class.

'Crunch point' also led me to question my use of, adherence to, and beliefs about the EP principles. Had I merely acquiesced to them in a rather superficial way without really working to understand what they meant? How did I reconcile the first principle to focus on 'quality of life', with a classroom where the EP work was seemingly causing strife? Did I still believe that working within the EP principles was a positive thing to do? If this hadn't been my doctoral research, how would I have acted at this point? At the time, I felt I had lost both my integrity and my way as a teacher, and that was a tough place to be.

Perhaps one of the key themes that emerged from the discussions around the poster was the fact that much of what I had shared resonated with other doctoral practitioner researchers present. There were various expressions of the importance of having different platforms from which to share and disseminate these experiences. Reports that highlight the issues, problems and even failures as well as the successes might contribute to a more realistic and informed view of what it means to be a practitioner-researcher, and possibly encourage others to have a go. Doing practitioner research as a doctoral project changes its nature in a nuanced, but nonetheless tangible way, and is therefore one that needs to be accounted for reflexively in the research process, and perhaps shared more widely.

Although this poster focuses very much on the tensions and conflicts that I felt throughout the process, it does little justice to the creative spaces that were opened up and the possibilities that emerged through the wearing of these two hats. I was not so aware of these during the 'data collection' period itself, but doctoral study offers the huge luxury of time to reflect, think, read, and question one's own assumptions and beliefs (such as those mentioned after 'crunch point' above). It also forces one to stand in the 'academy', whose alternative perspectives and demands can help move you forward in new and creative ways. But that is another poster for another time …(for a more recent, creative interpretation of this experience, see Dawson, 2017).

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Why is it so complex to balance control, trust and autonomy? Challenges faced in a teacher education programme

Inés K. Miller and Walewska G. Braga

https://goo.gl/qC9oCg

Some introductory words

This paper is based on the poster that we presented at the ReSIG PCE at the 2015 IATEFL Conference in Manchester. On that occasion, we addressed some of the puzzles that have been emerging in the context of a Government Grant Programme for Initial Teacher Education, implemented country-wide in federal universities, and specifically at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (PIBID-PUC-Rio | CAPES). Within this Programme, undergraduate students who are studying to be teachers receive grants to be able to become close collaborators of a public sector teacher. As grantees, they all have the unique chance of sharing the everyday routine of a public sector school.

Under Inés' coordination, the activities developed in the English component of the PIBID-PUC-Rio | CAPES have been inspired by the rationale of Exploratory Practice (Allwright & Hanks, 2009). As Walewska is acknowledged to be the most exploratory of practitioners in the Rio Exploratory Practice Group (Miller et al, in Allwright and Hanks, 2009), she was chosen to participate in the PIBID Programme, both as a school teacher and as the school-based programme supervisor for a group of five future teachers. In this poster, we focused on the (re)construction of Walewska's personal professional identity at this point in her career. In Allwright and Hanks (2009), we find many narratives of Walewska's and her students' exploratory 'work for understanding' and, in Miller et al (2015), the first published reflection about our work with future teachers within the PIBID Programme.

Walewska's reflective narrative

When in 2013, Inés Miller, my longtime Exploratory Practice mentor and partner, invited me to join the PIBID Programme, I accepted because I thought that my students – the future teachers – and I would be able to co-construct a large and diverse range of learning opportunities.

Since then, fifteen future teachers have joined me and the primary school pupils of my six English classes at the Municipal School Santo Tomás de Aquino, where I work. Their weekly presence refreshed my

practice and contributed to the development of all the groups. They have become fully integrated into the school's work routine, as the guiding principle is not for them to be 'mere' trainees who observe and take notes in class. The more they participate and get involved, the better. As a supervisor, I am also encouraged to stimulate their autonomy.

When I joined the Exploratory Practice Group, a turning point in my career, I came across the Exploratory Practice principles. Their focus on understanding helped me re-consider the challenges of classroom life, always as unpredictable as life itself. I have come to understand that, as teachers, we cannot be in control of all situations. As teachers *and* learners (*practitioners*, as we say in Exploratory Practice), we learn to appreciate the potential of devoting time and energy to understanding what puzzles us and/or our learners about teaching-learning or about classroom life. For EP, the term 'puzzle' represents our concern for developing understandings in relation to issues of immediate interest, whether or not they are 'problematic' and whether or not we connect them to theory (Allwright & Hanks, 2009: 146).

Despite my Exploratory Practice orientation, some doubts, anxieties and uncertainties came along with my acceptance of the new role of PIBID supervisor. But, being an exploratory practitioner, I was soon embracing my own puzzles, as I anticipated more and more learning opportunities. Some of my puzzles were: *What would be the best way to avoid controlling the future teachers and orientate them according to their needs instead? Why is it difficult to balance control, trust and autonomy?*

Within the paradigm of Exploratory Practice, we encourage teachers to work together *with* learners and to enjoy the countless learning opportunities that understanding classroom life collaboratively provides us with. Such joint work is also expected to generate mutual development. So, I invited my whole group of future teachers and, later, some students to join me in the process of enhancing my understandings of the ongoing process of my identity (re)construction.

The starting point involved taking a closer look at our online communication, which was initially exchanged through weekly e-mails, and later, upon the insistence of my younger group, through *Facebook* and *Whatsapp* messages,. When I read the messages that I had been sending to the group of future teachers every Sunday evening with guidelines for the week, I felt that I was acting as a control-oriented person. *To what extent was I stimulating their autonomy or directing their work?* The fact that I was responsible for paying attention to the future teachers' attendance, punctuality and behavior also led me to make what, at first, I considered to be invasive moves. Surely, this was not at all the identity that I had expected to project as part of my new role.

A more attentive and 'exploratory' look helped me discover my discursive attempts to involve the future teachers in 'planning for understanding' – not for controlling – what 'was going on' or could go on in our classrooms (Allwright, 2003). We unearthed, also, my beliefs in listening to them, as human beings, as well as my intention to guide them and foster opportunities for each one to find their own various ways of dealing with the students and the classroom. Another puzzle emerged: *Should I consider their insecurity, their mistakes (justified for beginners), their difficulties in managing time and some immature behaviour regarding our relationship as natural?*

Once I started the process of reflecting on the notion of control, I noticed that, professionally, I am expected to teach by the book, to follow institutional rules and the school schedule, to be punctual and, also, to deal with obligatory teaching materials. As an exploratory teacher and, currently, programme supervisor, I became more aware of the professional paradox that we, as teachers, experience: sometimes, I feel that control is not only a negative notion, as I had first thought. On other occasions, I realize that control is accepted and understood as necessary in our society.

My personal beliefs in engaging students and future teachers in every step of my work were making room for a relationship based on trust. I was 'doing being' their mentor *with* them and not *for* them. I noticed that my pupils trust the future teachers: they turn to them whenever they have doubts, they call them teachers. I understood that, despite my anxieties, my work as a mentor was stimulating trust and autonomy for all the members of the group.

On a Friday afternoon, during a PIBID meeting at PUC-Rio, we all engaged in a productive discussion of my initial concerns and subsequent reflections with the group. We welcomed everybody's opinions and shared our understandings in order to build our poster. To my surprise and relief, my group of future teachers felt 'orientated' but not 'suffocated' by my 'control'. Barbara suggested the use of the infinity symbol to illustrate our reflections on how control, trust and autonomy could coexist and feed into one another in our work, inside and/or outside classrooms. Anna Paula, Annyelle, Amanda and Thamires engaged in making the poster bilingual. The arrival of some 9th grade students enriched these enjoyable moments. With the poster on the wall we added, changed and replaced the data. In keeping with Exploratory Practice, the whole process of co-construction was permeated with exchange, creativity, respect, humour and joy. It was a continuous and sustainable reflexive process that brought us closer together, enriched us as human beings, and taught us beyond the textbook.

The PCE discussion as a learning opportunity

Some participants expressed great interest in the way in which we have been incorporating Exploratory Practice in the Initial Teacher Education course and in the PIBID programme. This was a significant moment in our careers as exploratory teacher educators, as we welcome the professional opportunity of reflecting on the delicate balance between control, trust and autonomy in our teacher education work and sharing our reflections with other colleagues. Inspired by Allwright's (2006, 2008) perspective of classroom life and of teacher education and development, we have been working to understand classrooms by moving away from the notions of simplicity and commonality, towards promising notions such as complexity and idiosyncrasy. Also aligned with Wright (2006:72), we perceive that "views on classroom management have shifted, from order to opportunity and from control to care (obedience to responsibility)". By reflecting together *with* future teachers on such issues, we feel that we are contributing to a world in which, as Wright (2006:82) puts it, teachers can "become more adept at exploiting the potential of classrooms as contexts where opportunities for learning can be generated and to see control as a potentially limited and limiting strategy for managing classrooms". With Allwright and Miller (2012), we also believe that integrating Exploratory Practice into future teachers' lives can be an 'antidote' to teacher burn-out.

Another significant point made in the PCE discussion came from Cynthia White, who, having understood that Walewska has been an exploratory practitioner for almost twenty years, suggested that it would be fascinating to trace Walewska's exploratory trajectory by analyzing her puzzles over the years. As Walewska is known for exploring both her own and her students' puzzles, the idea resonated with us as an especially attractive way of understanding the paths that this exploratory teacher, her learners and more recently, her groups of future teachers, have been following as practitioners of learning.

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My discovery trail from a novice EFL teacher to a teacher educator and researcher

Susanna Schwab

https://goo.gl/C2xw5M

When you depart for Ithaca, wish for the road to be long,
full of adventure, full of knowledge …
(Cavafy, C. P. translated into English)

I have chosen 'discovery trail' as part of the title because my journey from the novice EFL teacher to researcher has taken a long time. I loved teaching from the very first minute (August 1990) and knew that I had found my vocation. I began teaching EFL at a lower secondary school (a state school in Switzerland) without any kind of teacher qualification. The school board employed me because I had a Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE) and two small children. One member actually said that because I had children myself, I would know how to teach. After about two years of teaching, I realized that I could not reach all my learners and I began wondering why. Nobody seemed to have quick-fix answers to my questions such as how to cater for slower learners.

My initial teacher training, which I began shortly after August 1990, did not contain a research module and it was only when I started my Master Studies in 1995 that I was introduced to research and reflective teaching. I started looking into learning styles, motivated by some trainers in a Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) course. In 1996 I attended a professional development course at the Norwich Institute of Language Education (NILE) and was introduced to Gardner's (1983, 2000) Multiple Intelligences (MI) Theory. I was hooked by Gardner's theory and his entry point approach but first had to focus on finishing my Master in Education in English Language Teaching (M Ed in ELT) where my dissertation was a case study on learners' use of language learning strategies. After that I managed to attend a summer institute at Harvard University and met Howard Gardner and David Perkins, who is well-known for the research project *Teaching for Understanding* (Blythe et al., 1998). It was during that course that I heard about Tomlinson (2001) and differentiating instruction (DI). When I realized that I could link MI and DI, I had found a new interest. I signed up for a Master of Advanced Studies (MAS) for the gifted and talented in Switzerland as I wanted to further combine the two themes and find out how to integrate them into my classrooms. Included in the MAS were two research modules, one with the focus on quantitative, the second

one with the focus on qualitative data. My MAS paper was on differentiating instruction for teaching English in the primary school classroom. Shortly before I completed my MAS studies, I got a post as a teacher educator at PHBern (University of Teacher Education, Bern, Switzerland) where I became involved in a project that focused on a paradigm shift in foreign language teaching. For the last six years that project, called *Passepartout*[1], and *Good Practice/Best Practices* for teaching English as a second foreign language at primary school have been my main interests. In 2011, I began doctoral studies and obtained my Doctor of Education in 2015. My doctoral studies allowed me to further develop my research skills as well as my reflective practitioner knowledge and skills. There were many opportunities to reflect on whether I practised what I preached. I was able to focus on a local problem for my project study/capstone project and conducted research into how in-service teachers perceived and experienced the implementation of a multilingual approach to language teaching during the first year of the implementation at primary school.

Where will my journey take me next? My latest research project is on the topic of vocabulary in a multilingual approach when English is the second foreign language, French the first foreign language, and German the first language/language of instruction (German = L1, French = L2, English = L3). Research questions such as what kind of synergies could there be when research conducted for an Oxford Dictionary on 80,000 words claimed that the English language has roots in French (28%), German (25%), and Latin (28%). A further question would then be which language level on the CEFR (Common European Framework of References) is necessary so that learners can best profit from cross-linguistic activities. There are plenty more questions for researchers to investigate how the *Passepartout* programme is being implemented – a programme that is based on an innovative curriculum and introduced a multilingual turn in languages education. Before I forget, I have not reached my *Ithaca*, I am still travelling on my beloved discovery trail.

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1 Passepartout see www.passepartout-sprachen.ch (in German)

Panel discussion summary

Mark Daubney

https://goo.gl/AXzSCD

Following the poster presentations, the day's activities were brought to an end with the panel discussion. The participants set the agenda by engaging the three 'Impulse speakers' – Sue Garton, David Nunan, and Cynthia White – on issues that had come to the fore during the event. In some respects, it was a round-up of the research-related concerns that had been voiced during the proceedings, but this would not do justice to the dynamic of the discussion that ensued. One of the fascinating aspects of the discussion as it unfolded was how it provided everybody present with insights into the potential and the constraints encountered by both participants and impulse speakers in their own particular contexts.

Other issues that were raised and discussed included:

- How, and to what extent, the gap between teacher practitioners and academic researchers can be bridged;
- The role of associations and groups, such as IATEFL and TESOL, and how these can support and encourage practitioner research, including the publication of research;
- How researchers can present their findings in a way that is manageable and engaging for teachers;
- How the sense of belonging through networks and support groups might bolster teacher engagement with different forms of research;
- The fundamental importance of the writing process to the research process itself, including the difficulty of interpreting the data vis-à-vis the collection of data;
- The degree to which academic discourse, including, for example, certain words, such as 'research', can engender certain pre- or misconceptions in teachers, thereby discouraging them from engaging with research.

These themes amply demonstrate the rich and insightful contributions that arose from this discussion in particular, and the PCE in general, and reinforces the importance of communities of practice, not only for sharing and disseminating research, but also for creating a sense of belonging capable of strengthening researcher identities.

Afterword

Mark Daubney

There was a certain moment during the 2015 ReSIG PCE, when, having watched several of my fellow presenters talk about their development as researchers, I decided I wanted to begin my own poster presentation by affirming the importance of sharing our experiences as researchers. I wanted to emphasise that it was in events such as these that I really *feel* like a researcher. I hadn't initially planned to do this, and given the limited time for the presentations, I was somewhat concerned that this decision would backfire. However, I decided to go ahead in order to voice my conviction that we develop and strengthen our identity as researchers by participating in such welcoming and stimulating events.

Like many others on the day, I was deeply impressed with the sheer variety of research-related issues being presented and discussed: the methodological choices, the settings, the opportunities, the ongoing struggles, the challenges, the sense of fulfilment and achievement. To mention only a few.

Yet, I think the overriding sensation participants took away from the 2015 PCE was that of being in the company of like-minded people exchanging ideas and observations about research-related issues - and feeling comfortable doing this. It is not unreasonable to assume that this positive working environment (further) encouraged the presenters' admirable honesty in talking about their involvement in the often messy, challenging and exciting process of doing research. Tien Mai's opening words at the beginning of his poster presentation (see *Strand 3*, in this volume) – "I didn't think an academic meeting of research could be this informal, connected and casual" – encapsulates this spirit. For some, then, there was a real sense of satisfaction - and surprise - that a 'research meeting' could be organised and conducted in this manner.

As Siân Etherington mentions in the *Introduction* to this volume, talking can help researchers. It can relativize the difficulties faced while they are carrying out research, thereby reducing a sense of isolation that can often overwhelm researchers at certain periods during the research process. Yet, talk can also inspire the creative ideas and solutions needed for research, helping, in turn, to boost confidence in relation to the sense of self as a researcher, as well as providing knowledge about the tools and approaches needed to collect and interpret data, and where, and in what forms, publication might be a viable option. We hope this collection of papers, based on and inspired by researchers *talking* about certain aspects of their experience, serves as an ex-

ample to encourage further participation, and demonstrates that opportunities, not only to get involved, but also to publish to an interested audience, do exist in relevant and respectable forms.

Such outcomes are likely to be given greater leverage by bringing together novice and more experienced researchers, in settings such as the 2015 PCE, where a mutual interest in research can create a dynamic of sharing. Judging by the 2015 PCE event, this appears more likely when the more formal constraints, alluded to above, are considerably more relaxed. Here, for example, I am thinking of seating arrangements or alternative formats for discussions.

Such considerations leave me with a strong feeling that we can think about the day's events in terms of a research community, coming together through the sharing of each other's stories. While the *Panel Discussion* did refer to the different spheres in which more experienced researchers and teacher practitioners worked, there was sufficient evidence to suggest the 2015 PCE could provide an example of how researchers of varying degrees of experience can create stronger ties and a community of practice. As Sue Garton mentioned in the same discussion, although such spheres exist, this does not preclude collaboration.

I would now like to relate some of the key ideas that have remained with me from the day.

Firstly, being part of research communities, means exercising agency. All participants on the day had chosen to attend, some travelling long distances to Manchester, to share their stories and to engage with issues arising from these. Insights, contacts and inspiration taken from the day's proceedings are likely to have increased the desire to continue doing research and participating in such occasions, strengthening, in turn, researcher identity. Furthermore, the insights shared from different contexts can often help to shape the decisions we make when faced with dilemmas, challenges or exciting choices in our own settings.

Secondly, 'process', as opposed to 'product', highlighted participant concerns. While some did discuss the findings of their own research, the theme, 'Developing as a researcher', was well-served by participants talking about various phases of their journeys as researchers, or how some of their completed research projects had impacted on their thinking. Naturally, this led to a fascinating focus on process and the tricky, slippery phases involved in research, but also included the sense of excitement and fulfilment of having done and continuing to do research; again underlining the importance of agency. I remember Becky Steven's enthusiastic poster presentation (see *Strand 1*), and how she reported being told 'research was not for teachers', but became involved in action-research projects in Australia, and has gone on to dispel such preconceptions. Agency in action.

I also remember Susan Dawson talking about the 'crunch moment' that marked her doctoral research (see *Strand 3*), and the 17-minute conversation with a student that caused her great concern and feelings of guilt. Both were incidents that I found fascinating because they are not only episodes that resonate with practitioners, but also embody the types of dilemmas that researchers exploring their own classrooms can face, and, pointedly, aspects of research that are too frequently omitted in presentations or publications. It is precisely exposure to these fascinating conundrums, among other aspects, that serve to support researcher development.

I keenly remember David Nunan's comment in the *Panel Discussion* on working with data. His take on collecting and interpreting data was that we have to 'torture data before it confesses'! This use of humour underlines a crucial point – that collecting data is relatively easy, but it is making sense of it which constitutes one of the most demanding phases of research. Avoiding data-overload should be a key concern for researchers, especially those with less experience. I also found that his comments that, with age, his priorities were now focused on what he really loves – qualitative research – especially revealing and helpful. It is essential for researchers to focus on their areas of interest and, within the constraints that shape their working contexts, do what they are passionate about. This is not always possible, of course, but this issue again highlights the importance of agency, and managing and exercising our choices.

I hope I have managed to convey some of the key issues that informed the day's proceedings. Forums such as these provide a democratic platform for voices – varied and authentic – to be heard, and any resulting publications are a veritable bonus, having the potential to provide a much needed proximity, a textual bridge so to speak, between readers, researchers and the research conducted. It is for this reason that one of our primary concerns for this collection of papers was the inclusion of the video-recordings of this PCE. It is one thing to read the excellent papers included here, another to listen to the speakers condensing and rendering their – often emotional – contributions into a presentation. Reading David Nunan's paper about the traumatic event that effectively triggered the start of his research career is undoubtedly shocking; but it was his spoken words that drew us in, had us audibly gasping, and then falling silently into a more reflective mood. It also revealed that research topics and questions are not always studiously gleaned from the literature, but that opportunities to conduct research are often the result of serendipity; and there are numerous puzzles, problems, challenges and questions to be considered and examined in our own classrooms and beyond.

As Norton (2010) opines, using the first person in the writing of research papers can help to 'demystify' well-known authors; it can engage

and enthuse readers. In contrast, third-person narrations in the prevailing style and voice of the academy are less likely to draw practitioners into research communities. How much more so, then, do these hybrid and 'multi-voiced' texts and events, where researchers tell their own and listen to others' stories, represent fertile soils in which to sow the seeds of further initiatives and co-operation? The potential appears to be considerable. Moreover, this represents a growing acceptance of what Norton (2010: xi) refers to as 'the centrality of personal experience' in our professional lives.

Meetings such as the 2015 PCE, then, may represent an important way of breaking down still powerful preconceptions of how research is carried out and presented. Attempts to attract greater numbers into the research community may partly reside in presenting research through alternative lenses and formats. The poster presentations and impulse talks, we believe, are worthy examples of alternative modes of talking about research.

This is not to prioritise the spoken over the written word, but simply to praise the nature of these events, and their potential to encourage real interest on the part of researchers with varying degrees of experience to share common interests and reap mutual benefits. Their voices – both written and spoken – can help to bolster a sense of the research community coming together. Again, we think this publication, and some of the essence of the event it attempts to 'bottle', represents a commendable effort to boost such a dynamic.

In sum, these events could provide the springboard to closer and further collaboration between researchers of all types, working in all types of settings. As Sue Garton argues in her *Impulse paper* in this volume, such occasions could provide the necessary impetus for more fruitful and beneficial research relationships in the field of ELT, as well as providing greater awareness of research projects and their respective findings.

The ReSIG 2015 PCE played its part in making a modest but valuable contribution to this process. We believe that those who shared stories about developing as a researcher experienced a feeling of greater proximity and a sense of community throughout the day, and now have these intangible but vital resources to draw upon to sustain their singular journeys as researchers, and to inform the constant reflection and adaptations that such journeys require.

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Information about ReSIG and IATEFL

The IATEFL Research SIG (ReSIG) is a unique forum for the discussion of issues connected with research into (or relating to) ELT, bringing together teachers, teacher-researchers, teacher educators and researchers from around the world. In this active community, members share their experiences of research, as well as findings from and interpretations of research, and network face-to-face at regular events, online via our discussion list, and in print via our newsletter, *ELT Research*.

Our webpage is http://resig.weebly.com/

As a member of IATEFL and the Research SIG you will enjoy the following benefits:

- IATEFL *Voices*, which is published 6 times a year.
- *ELT Research*, our SIG Newsletter, which is published once a year.
- Access to special rates for the IATEFL Annual Conference, Research SIG events, selected periodicals (including the *ELT Journal* and the *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*) and other IATEFL publications, plus (currently) free access to *Language Teaching* and *English Today*.
- Access to scholarships made available to ReSIG members (see the 'Scholarships' tab) and to IATEFL members.

Becoming a Member

To join the **Research Special Interest Group** you need to be a member of **IATEFL** – the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language. You can take out a membership online here. If you are already an IATEFL member and you want simply to add ReSIG to a SIG membership you already have, please contact Eleanor Baynham in the IATEFL office (eleanor@iatefl.org) – indeed, contact Eleanor if you have any SIG membership concerns. For information and enquiries about joining IATEFL please visit the IATEFL website.

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This book is based on the IATEFL Research Special Interest Group Pre-Conference Event held in Manchester in April 2015. The event aimed to provide a platform for EFL researchers to exchange stories about important aspects of their own development, with a view to encouraging greater awareness about these issues.

Participants shared their stories using creative and colourful poster presentations. Each paper in the book is developed from the author's/authors' original poster presentation, and is also linked to the online video recording of the poster presentation on the day. The book aims to capture a sense of the event, characterised by stimulating exchanges in an informal and friendly setting. The book also includes the papers of the invited 'impulse' speakers who introduced each group of posters: David Nunan, Sue Garton and Cynthia White. The final section of the book provides a summary of the closing panel discussion, again with a link to the video-recording from the day.

Themes within the book include the challenges and pleasures of the research journey; learning to be a writer of research; dealing with the uncertainties and complexity of qualitative data; what it means to be a researcher, and the shifting sense of researcher identity.

The book as a whole presents an in-depth picture of real-life dilemmas, challenges and pleasures experienced by EFL researchers as they develop their craft. In uncovering these often hidden aspects of researcher development, the book provides a valuable service to the EFL research community and beyond.

"This collection of papers from practitioner-researchers provides fascinating insights into the issues, challenges and puzzles as teachers (and learners, and teacher-educators) engage in researching their classrooms. It conveys the excitement and the struggles involved in developing as a practitioner-researcher."

Dr Judith Hanks
University of Leeds

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