

Grants for research

Writing a good proposal

*Interested in small-scale classroom research? Want to win a scholarship to attend an IATEFL conference? Why not apply for the (IATEFL) International House John Haycraft Classroom Exploration Scholarship? **Jane Willis** explains what you need to do to be in with a chance.*

Scholarship aims and time-scale

The aim of this scholarship is to encourage practising teachers to embark on or to continue small-scale classroom exploration projects in order to shed light on aspects of the classroom language learning experience.

You may decide to undertake a research project specifically to enable you to apply for an award. You can also enter projects already under way or projects planned for the next academic year. However projects already completed will not be accepted.

The idea is that scholarship winners will present their projects and results at the following year's IATEFL conference. The June deadline for the submission of your scholarship application (in the form of a research outline) allows you time to finalise your project design and submit your talk proposal by the IATEFL conference September deadline. During the next six months, you will work on your research and prepare your report.

How the scholarship got started

In 2006, Corony Edwards and I won a British Council ELT Innovation award for our book *Teachers Exploring Tasks in English Language Teaching*, a collection of short papers written by teachers, for teachers, describing a wide range of small research projects investigating – using various methods – what actually happens when tasks are used in class. Around twenty teachers from different teaching contexts and levels contributed, and the Innovation Award judges felt that their research methods and findings would inspire and enable many teachers to explore the interaction in their classrooms in a similar way.

Corony and I recognised that the work was not ours alone. It had been done by a significant number of classroom teacher-researchers. And we know from our contact with teachers and with our MA students that there are lots of teachers out there doing similarly

valuable work. So we decided to donate the prize money to finance a scholarship to the IATEFL Exeter Conference in 2008 to encourage further classroom research. The following year, International House kindly stepped in to 'adopt' this scholarship and there are now two scholarships awarded annually. The scholarship is named in memory of the founder of International House, John Haycraft.

The selection criteria for the award

Applicants are asked to submit a research outline and rationale of between 400 and 500 words. If you decide to apply – and we hope you will – you need to make sure that your submission will satisfy **all** the criteria listed below:

1. The project should be small-scale and classroom based.
2. The research topic should be suitable for its social and educational context.
3. The objectives of the research should be clearly defined and achievable.
4. The procedures used for data collection and analysis should be clear
5. The work should be original/ innovative in some way.
6. The process and/ or outcomes should be useful to other teachers/ trainers.

The first thing to remember is that your project must include some genuine research, not just consist of a new course plan or new materials, resources or techniques or other innovation – no matter how successful. You need to carry out some classroom exploration – some research to find out what actually happens when you implement it/them. Ideally your research will relate to a question you want to explore as you carry out your project. No matter how excellent the innovation, (and there have been some brilliant ideas submitted in the past years) if the research element is missing, it won't gain this award. Remember that other kinds of IATEFL scholarship exist, one of which may be more suitable for your project than this one!

You will probably begin your submission by briefly describing your context and your innovation, but then you will need to give the rationale and the research question or puzzle that you want to shed light on. Follow this with a short account of how you are going to explore / investigate what actually happens during (and possibly after) its implementation. These research procedures, including the methods used to collect the data that you need in order to answer your research question, need to be clearly outlined.

So what kind of research?

The project needs to be small-scale and your goals achievable. It is more likely to involve qualitative or descriptive research based on one or two classrooms, (as is generally the case with Action Research or Exploratory Practice – see references at end), than quantitative involving ‘experimental’ groups and control groups, which by their very nature often need to become large-scale for the results to be of general use. The aim is for you as teacher to gain a deeper understanding of the processes of teaching and learning in your own classroom. If you do want to tackle some quantitative research, be aware that it is often difficult to control all variables adequately, and also that the variables you control in your classes may not be appropriate or even valid in other teaching situations.

A good submission typically includes:

- An informative title;
- A brief description of your teaching context and/or a background to the research area;
- A specific research question, stating what you want to explore, and why, with a brief rationale, possibly relating this to previous observations or theories. For example, former scholarship winner Daniela Callegari from Italy, who had been exploring the effects of cooperative learning on oral skills in EFL classes, formulated her new research question as follows: ‘What kinds of tasks would be most effective to promote oral competences in a monolingual Italian class of 9 year- old children?’;
- An action plan with an approximate timescale,
- Details of the research process – e.g. data collection methods and how data will be analysed;
- What you hope to end up with, e.g. ‘By the end of my research I’d like to have ...’;
- The reasons why your research might be of interest to other teachers.

Other tips

- Give your project a title that reflects its content area and main focus;
- Use sub-headings and bullet points e.g. when outlining an action plan or listing data collection procedures;
- Keep within the word limit. If your submission is over 500 words it will not be considered;
- Get a colleague to read the list of criteria and then comment on your submission;
- Finally – don’t worry if your research does not run smoothly or progress according to your expectations. It may still be useful to others and well worth reporting.

A personal footnote

As judges, (and we are usually a panel of four, from diverse ELT backgrounds), we were delighted with the wide range of topics and ideas offered last year. The

submissions made really interesting reading – many quite inspiring.

We hope that this year you will look for something interesting to explore in your classroom. We look forward to hearing about it. Hopefully we will see you at the next IATEFL conference or read about your project in the Research SIG newsletter or IATEFL *Voices*.

References

Burns, A. 2009 *Doing Action Research in English Language Teaching: A Guide for Practitioners* Routledge.

Edwards, C. and J. Willis (eds) 2005. *Teachers Exploring Tasks in ELT*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

For more on Exploratory Practice see http://www.prodait.org/resources/exploratory_practicing.pdf

IATEFL Scholarships

The John Haycraft International House Classroom Research scholarship is offered every year, with a deadline (usually) in June. All IATEFL members are alerted annually to this opportunity via the IATEFL e-bulletin, and Research SIG will send out details also when the next round of applications is open. See also:

<http://www.iatefl.org/information/scholarships>

Research SIG offers its own scholarships of £250 to attend selected research methods events, in particular events organized by the SIG (see the back inside cover for an announcement of our next event – an action research workshop with Anne Burns); see also:

<http://resig.weebly.com/scholarships.html>

Winning proposals

Congratulations to Research SIG member Ana Inés Salvi and to Sandy Millin for winning the two (IATEFL) International House John Haycraft Classroom Exploration Scholarships awarded for 2011-12. Here (with their permission) are the texts of Ana's and Sandy's full winning proposals, followed by links to the reports of their research which they ended up giving at the 2012 IATEFL Conference in Glasgow.

If you need to or want to write a classroom research proposal of your own it might be useful for you to compare Ana's and Sandy's winning proposals below with the criteria and advice Jane Willis has given us in her article above.

Winning proposal (1): Getting Students to Use Internet Resources

Sandy Millin

For the last year I have been using Edmodo.com (an interface designed for education and similar to facebook) to share materials, online activities and other links with students to extend work done in class. However, based on a survey I did at the end of the academic year only about half of the students have taken advantage of these materials. I would therefore like to investigate the following two questions, with the aim of encouraging more of my students to exploit the wealth of materials available on the internet:

- What factors help or hinder students' uptake and continued use of online materials to aid their English learning outside the classroom?
- What can teachers do in class to encourage students to take advantage of available materials and help them to overcome any obstacles?

For the purpose of this research 'online materials' are "anything freely available on the internet which could help students improve their English skills or systems." Examples include, among others, voice recorders, concordancers, cultural information and grammar explanations and exercises.

At the end of the research I would like to have:

- a list of characteristics displayed by students who regularly use online materials to further their study;
- a corresponding list for students who are more reluctant to use online materials;
- a summary of the type of online materials which students find most useful;

- ideas for teachers to use in class to encourage reluctant students to begin to exploit online materials.

In order to reach these objectives, I will:

- Ask a new group to complete an initial questionnaire detailing their study habits, including questions about their use of and access to online materials and what materials they already use.
- Interview a selection of students based on the questionnaire, covering both those who do and do not use online materials to discover what factors influence their uptake of these resources.
- Provide links to online materials to the students throughout the course. Base the choice of which links to share on a learning styles analysis, coupled with the work done in lessons. Ask students to provide a star rating (1-5) for each link to assess which are the most useful.
- Ask a selection of students to keep a week-long log of the online and offline materials they use outside class.
- Assess students' responses to online materials based on interaction in the online environment (such as replies to a link posted on Edmodo) and discussions we have during lessons.
- Administer two further surveys at the mid- and endpoints of the course to find out whether students' use of the available materials has changed.
- Experiment in the classroom to encourage reluctant students to use online materials during the course, noting which activities students best respond to.

I hope this research will be of interest to teachers who want to encourage their students to make the most of materials available on the internet.

Winning proposal (2): Combining autonomy-oriented pedagogy and practitioner research via Exploratory Practice

Ana Inés Salvi

During classes on the MA in ELT which I am currently undertaking part-time I came across the ideas of Learner Autonomy (Holec, 1981; Dam, 1995) and Exploratory Practice. Although these concepts were new to me, I could immediately identify elements of both of them in some of my past teaching experiences which had been particularly successful. This discovery prompted me to explore my previous and current teaching practice further, through discussion with colleagues and tutors on the MA programme, through related reading, and through reflective writing in a teaching journal.

I discovered through this process that enabling learners to take a greater degree of control over their classroom learning may have been the main reason why some of my classes had been particularly successful, at least from my point of view, in the past. I also realized that Exploratory Practice, as promoted by Dick Allwright, could be a very appropriate way to understand better the nature of the kind of autonomy-oriented teaching approach I had engaged in and now wish to engage in further, with a view also to disseminating the lessons to be learnt more widely. Particularly in its more recent manifestation (Allwright and Hanks, 2009), issues or puzzles generated by students are central in Exploratory Practice, and this seems to tie in very well with the demands of a learner-centred, indeed autonomy-oriented approach.

My proposed research project is aimed at exploring the impact a learner-centred pedagogy can have on language learners' development, and gaining insights into the feasibility of incorporating the principles of Learner Autonomy and Exploratory Practice into my practice in two very different contexts, namely, a five-week summer school course for teenagers with a School of English in London in July/August 2011, and a five-week EAP university course for graduate students at a university in August/September 2011. Specifically, I will offer learners in both contexts choices regarding objectives, materials, tasks and forms of evaluation; I will promote group work; and I will encourage learners to explore their own puzzles about their learning lives.

Throughout, I will record my observations self-critically in a teaching journal, carry out focus group interviews with learners outside class, and end each course with a comprehensive questionnaire to access students' own perspectives on the experience. My final report will make use of all this data, and will be based on themes

which emerge from a content analysis in relation to the overall aims (above).

I expect this classroom research project to be useful not only to the participants (myself and the students) concerned but also to other teachers, encouraging them to try out comparable ideas in other contexts like primary or secondary schools. Indeed, my intention is to continue this research when I return to Argentina, in the belief that Learner Autonomy and Exploratory Practice are likely to be well-matched to resource-poor settings like state schools in Argentina where learners' motivation needs to be seriously rekindled.

References

Allwright, D. & J. Hanks. 2009. *The Developing Language Learner: An Introduction to Exploratory Practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dam, L. 1995. *Learner Autonomy: From Theory to Classroom Practice*. Ireland: Authentik.

Holec, H. 1981. *Autonomy and Foreign Language Learning*. Oxford: Pergamon.

Winning entry presentations

You can access both Ana's video-recorded conference presentation and Sandy's blog post and video-recorded version of her conference presentation in the new Teacher-Research section of our website at <http://resig.weebly.com/teacher-research.html>.

This section of the website showcases practitioner research conducted by language teachers and teacher educators. We are aiming to encourage sharing of experience through presentations in a wide variety of conventional and innovative formats such as video-recorded conference presentations, podcast versions of conference presentations, newsletter articles, more formal reports, and so on. You can also raise and discuss any issues you like in connection with ELT teacher-research.

International House John Haycraft Classroom Exploration Scholarship winners!



Left to right: 2011 John Haycraft Classroom Exploration Scholarship winners Sandy Millin and Ana Inés Salvi with Chair of the IATEFL Scholarships Committee Eryl Griffiths and original co-founder of the scholarship, Jane Willis. The photo was taken after Ana's talk at the 2012 IATEFL conference in Liverpool.

Announcement: 3 November 2012 Workshop on Action Research, led by Anne Burns



We are very glad to announce that Professor Anne Burns, author of *Doing Action Research in English Language Teaching: A Guide for Practitioners* (Routledge, 2010), will be facilitating this Saturday workshop. The workshop, organized by ReSIG, will take place at the University of Reading, UK. Further details here:

<http://resig.weebly.com/events.html>

Booking is now open. If you wish to attend, please book online via the above URL.

Early-bird (cheaper rate) booking ends on **1st October**. Non-members as well as members of IATEFL are very welcome to take part in the event, though the fee is cheaper for ReSIG members.

There is a scholarship opportunity for IATEFL Research SIG members wishing to attend the workshop. Details here:

<http://resig.weebly.com/scholarships.html>

The deadline for applications for the scholarship (open to ReSIG members only) is **24th October**.

MA in Teaching English to Young Learners

By Distance

The Department of Education at The University of York, UK, have been delivering this award-winning Masters programme for 16 years. We now deliver this distance learning Masters programme in several countries and online.

This two-year, part-time programme has several starting dates each year: October (online), December (Singapore), March (online), July (Norway) and August (Switzerland).

The MA in TEYL comprises 2 intensive face-to-face or online modules (one at the start of each study year) plus 8 multimedia, self-study modules. Emphasis within the modules is on the linking of theory and practice, making extensive use of material from authentic young learner classes.

Modules are highly structured, with detailed and directed study, supported by an online virtual learning environment. Throughout the programme, students have continuous guidance and support from a dedicated supervisor who is a TEYL specialist. Students are expected to study for 13-18 hours per week and each module is assessed by way of a written assignment. The final assignment is a report on Action Research carried out by the student.

Upon successful completion of the programme, students will be awarded a Masters qualification and all graduating students of the programme are invited to the graduation ceremony at The University of York.

There is an annual tuition fee for each year of study on the programme. The tuition fee for the first year of study, commencing July 2012 — July 2013, is £5,090.00. The fee for the second year of study is usually subject to an increase.

For further information please visit our website at www.york.ac.uk/teyl.

Enquiries can be sent to the MA in TEYL administrator at educ12@york.ac.uk.

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