Event 3

Issues in EAP classroom research: Action research vs exploratory practice

25 November 2011

Fulwood Room, 5th Floor, University House
Western Bank, Sheffield, S10 2TG
# ResTES Event 3 Programme

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<td><em>Professor Glynis Cousin, University of Wolverhampton</em></td>
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Please email [research@baleap.org](mailto:research@baleap.org) if you have queries about this event.
ResTES Event 3 Abstracts

**Researching Learning in Higher Education**
*Professor Glynis Cousin, University of Wolverhampton*

In this workshop I will present some ideas before exploring practice based research approaches with participants. My methodological focus will be on how we might research university education in trustworthy, interesting and creative ways. I will talk a little about the methodological framework that I think best suits inquiry in this field to prompt discussion about theoretical underpinnings to education research. I will then support participants to explore research questions and methods. I hope that participants will emerge from the workshop with some new ideas of both theoretical and practical interest for setting up teaching and learning projects.

**The Scholarship of Teaching for Learning: Using the TEAP Competency Framework to Research Your Practice for Professional Development and Accreditation Purposes**
*Garry Maguire, Oxford Brookes University*

This workshop enables participants to adapt their approach to investigating their own teaching practice to one which directly draws on the TEAP Competency Framework. The framework can be exploited for evaluating current practice, identifying areas for research and as a basis for collating and generating data sufficient to satisfy the evidence requirements of the developing portfolio award. Opportunity to begin this process, to share research practice and to contribute to the development of EAP professional standards is provided.
Combining autonomy-oriented pedagogy and practitioner research via Exploratory Practice

Ana Salvi, University of Warwick

The research project I am currently engaged in 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 (Holec, 1981; Dam, 1995) and Exploratory Practice into my practice in two very different contexts, namely, a five-week summer school course for teenagers in London in July/August 2011, and a five-week EAP university course for postgraduate students at the University of Warwick in August/September 2011.

Prior to engaging in this project I had come to the conclusion 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 have engaged in. 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.

Specifically, I have been offering learners in both contexts choices regarding objectives, materials, tasks and forms of evaluation; promoting group work; and encouraging learners to explore their own puzzles about their learning lives. Throughout, I have video recorded lessons; gathered students’ written feedback and reflections; and I have ended each course with focus group interviews to access students’ own perspectives on the experience. My final report – parts of which I will be able to present in Sheffield 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).

References


Implementing Exploratory Practice in English for Academic Purposes: Ethical dilemmas and practical considerations

Judith Hanks, University of Leeds

Conducting research in one's own classrooms/workplace requires awareness of a range of ethical and practical issues. Questions regarding the pursuit of knowledge, and the rights and responsibilities of the participants, including discussion of confidentiality, avoidance of harm, and informed consent have long been debated in the literature (AARE, 2009; BERA, 2004; Pring, 2001; Small, 2001). In addition, practical constraints such as lack of time and resources (Borg, 2009, 2010; Burton, 1998; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001), for researchers and teachers alike, are well-documented in practitioner research in education.

In an attempt to address these issues, Exploratory Practice (EP) promotes a principled approach to combining pedagogy, practice and research in the language classroom (Allwright, 1993, 2001, 2005; Gieve & Miller, 2006). This approach claims to offer a wealth of opportunities for practitioners to investigate their own learning and teaching practices, set their own agendas and disseminate findings to each other (Allwright & Hanks, 2009). But what happens to the EP principles when practitioners engage in research into their own practices?

In this paper I discuss the ethical dilemmas and the practical issues involved when EP is incorporated into goal-oriented, intensive programmes of study in English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Through two case studies, undertaken as part of my on-going doctoral studies, I illustrate the practical constraints of setting up and carrying out practitioner research in the EAP classroom, and consider the ethical issues related to such work, particularly when attempting to also conform to the requirements of a PhD. I examine the challenges faced by practitioners wishing to incorporate EP into their EAP work, and relate my own dilemmas as I negotiate these complexities.

References
Action research: A viable alternative to evaluative observations?
Diarmuid Fogarty, INTO Manchester

This talk will describe the exploratory steps I have taken as part of my research for an MA in TEFL from Sheffield Hallam University. My research question is “What steps might be taken to transform the current evaluative observation procedures in order to facilitate my own professional development and that of my colleagues?”

My research begins with a critical evaluation of the current procedures that are in place for observing the quality of teaching within the institution where I work. This highlights a tension, well-reported in the literature, that arises from the supposed dual purpose of observations: to provide data upon which to evaluate the quality of teaching and to act as a catalyst for teachers’ professional development. This preliminary evaluation finds that the current procedures are failing in both regards.

The next step in the research has been to set up a group of participants who will trial a new approach based upon the principles of action research. The argument is that by approaching their practice in a systematic and principled manner, teachers are able to demonstrate their fit for purpose as well as develop themselves professionally and personally.

I will explain how I became interested in action research, what steps I took to find out more about it and how I have started to introduce it into my daily practice. I will argue that action research is the most appropriate method for practitioners within education and that this is an unacknowledged fact. I will argue that this represents a failing on our part to acknowledge our debt to a methodology that is still struggling within the positivist-biased atmosphere of the academy.

Bibliography
Redesigning an Academic Writing Course for higher level university students in Ukraine
Larysa Sanotska, “Ivan Franko” National University, Lviv

Research shows that an EAP course can be built according to perceived students’ needs and constraints (Jordan 1997: 65). The Academic Writing Course for Ukrainian English Philology bachelor students was designed by the author in response to rapidly changing needs and specific challenges that academic mobility provides nowadays. Throughout the Course, which was taught to several groups of bachelor students, the author observed the students and administered formative and summative assessments. As a result, it was concluded that while writing essays and papers the students still struggled with sentence / paper structure and misuse vocabulary. Analysis of the data suggested guidelines to modify the Course in order to make it more effective for Ukrainian university students. The presentation is based on the research which was aimed to verify that the previously designed Course would benefit if translation techniques are implemented. Translation activities in monolingual groups would serve to improve students’ performance by activating schemata, increasing motivation, familiarizing students with style peculiarities in both languages in order to distinguish between them. Eventually, students would become more able to avoid native-language influence in writing in English. The research was conducted in two groups of students: translation activities were administered in one of them. Alongside questionnaires, survey and interviews, the author applied ethnography, as the content she dealt with was ‘specific’ considering the students’ history of learning L 2 (often leading to jagged profiles) and L 2 - linguistic isolation. The author also noted and compared the data of the students’ progress in two assessments.

Bibliography