

Collaborative Action Research for English Language Teachers



CAMBRIDGE LANGUAGE TEACHING LIBRARY

A series covering central issues in language teaching and learning, by authors who have expert knowledge in their field

In this series:

Affect in Language Learning edited by Jane Arnold

Approaches in Methods in Language Teaching by Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers

Appropriate Methodology and Social Context by Adrian Holliday

Beyond Training by Jack C. Richards

Collaborative Action Research For English Language Teachers by Anne Burns

Collaborative Language Learning and Teaching edited by David Nunan

Communicative Language Teaching by William Littlewood

Communicative Methodology in Language Teaching by Christopher Brumfit

Course Design by Fraida Dubin and Elite Olshtain

Culture Bound edited by Joyce Merrill Valdes

Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom by David Nunan

Developing Reading Skills by Françoise Grellet

Developments in ESP by Tony Dudley-Evans and Maggie Jo St John

Discourse Analysis for Language Teachers by Michael McCarthy

Discourse and Language Education by Evelyn Hatch

English for Academic Purposes by R. R. Jordan

English for Specific Purposes by Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters

Focus on the Language Classroom by Dick Allwright and Kathleen M. Bailey

Foreign and Second Language Learning by William Littlewood

Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective edited by Michael Byram and Michael Fleming

The Language Teaching Matrix by Jack C. Richards

Language Test Construction and Evaluation by J. Charles Alderson, Caroline Clapham and Dianne Wall

Learner-centredness as Language Education by Ian Tudor

Managing Curricular Innovation by Numa Markee

Materials Development in Language Teaching edited by Brian Tomlinson

Psychology for Language Teachers by Marion Williams and Robert L. Burden

Research Methods in Language Learning by David Nunan

Second Language Teacher Education edited by Jack C. Richards and David Nunan

Society and the Language Classroom edited by Hywell Coleman

Teacher Learning in Language Teaching edited by Donald Freeman and Jack C. Richards

Teaching the Spoken Language by Gillian Brown and George Yule

Understanding Research in Second Language Learning by James Dean Brown Vocabulary: Description, Acquisition and Pedagogy edited by Norbert Schmitt and Michael McCarthy

Vocabulary, Semantics, and Language Education by Evelyn Hatch and Cheryl Brown

Voices From the Language Classroom edited by Kathleen M. Bailey and David Nunan



Collaborative Action Research for English Language Teachers

Anne Burns





CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

www.cambridge.org Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521630849

© Cambridge University Press 1999

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1999 Reprinted 2001, 2003

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN-13 978-0-521-63084-9 hardback ISBN-10 0-521-63084-3 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-63895-1 paperback ISBN-10 0-521-63895-X paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2005



For Ross, Douglas and Catherine



Contents

	Acknowledgements Preface	X
I	Why should teachers do action research?	7
I.I	Action research: a case study	7
1.2	A collaborative perspective on action research	12
1.3	Teachers' responses to action research	14
1.4	Summary	17
·	Group discussion tasks	18
2	Definitions and processes	20
2.1	Introduction	20
2.2	Quantitative approaches to research	21
2.3	Qualitative approaches to research	22
2.4	Action research	24
2.5	What are the origins of action research?	26
2.6	What does action research involve?	29
2.7	What are the processes of doing action research?	35
2.8	Summary	43
	Group discussion tasks	44
3	Getting started	45
3.1	Introduction	45
3.2	Constraints and impediments	45
3.3	Finding a focus	53
3.4	The role of theory in question formulation	68
3.5	Ethical considerations	70
3.6	Summary	75
	Group discussion tasks	76

vii



Contents

4	Observational techniques for collecting action	
	research data	78
4.I	Introduction	78
4.2	Observation	80
4.3	Notes and diaries	85
4.4	Audio and video recording	94
4.5	Photographs	IOI
4.6	Charting the social organisation of the classroom	105
4· 7	Summary	115
	Group discussion tasks	116
5	Non-observational techniques for data collection	117
5.1	Introduction	117
5.2	Interviews	118
5.3	Surveys and questionnaires	129
5.4	Life and career histories	136
5.5	Documents	140
5.6	Metaphor development	147
5·7	Summary	150
	Group discussion tasks	151
6	Analysing action research data	152
6.1	Introduction	152
6.2	What is data analysis?	153
6.3	When should data be analysed?	154
6.4	Processes of analysis	156
6.5	Validity and action research	160
6.6	Enhancing trustworthiness in action research	162
6.7	Techniques for analysing data	166
6.8	Summary	179
	Group discussion tasks	180
7	Disseminating the research and sustaining the action	181
7 . 1	Introduction	181
7.2	Disseminating the research	181
7·3	Sustaining the action	201
7 · 4	Summary	212
	Group discussion tasks	212

viii



		Contents
8	Collaborative action research in practice	214
8.1	Introduction	214
8.2	Action research as professional development Jane Hamilton	215
8.3	Using English outside the classroom Janette Kohn	221
8.4	The Teams/Competencies Project The staff of Wilkins Intensive English Centre	225
8.5	Strategies for 'non-language' outcomes Lenn de Leon	229
8.6	Concluding remarks	233
	Further reading	236
	References	243
	Index	255



Acknowledgements

Numerous people have supported and encouraged me in the writing of this book. My appreciation and thanks are first due to the many teachers who have collaborated with me as practitioner researchers. Their names are too numerous to list individually, but their contributions as well as their enthusiasm for teacher research are hopefully well reflected throughout the book.

Chris Candlin, Geoff Brindley and Catherine du Peloux Menagé, my colleagues at the National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research at Macquarie University, must also be thanked for their ongoing support and encouragement of my work. I am grateful also to the staff of the Resource Centre at NCELTR for their endless patience in chasing up books, articles and references whenever I needed them. Jenny Hammond and Helen Joyce deserve special mention for their reading and editing of the manuscript at various stages and for their suggestions and discussions. My collaboration with my co-researcher and co-editor, Susan Hood, has been a constant source of stimulation as well as personal pleasure over a number of years.

Thanks are also due to Alison Sharpe of Cambridge University Press who greatly encouraged me at an early stage to consider that the book could be a reality and to Mickey Bonin who took over from Alison and kept me going at just the right point in the process. Julia Harding, who edited the manuscript, brought a fresh editorial eye to my writing and made many useful suggestions.

As always, my patient and uncomplaining family have supported and encouraged me throughout the entire enterprise. It is to them that I affectionately dedicate the book.

The publishers and I are grateful to the following copyright owners for permission to reproduce copyright material. Every endeavour has been made to contact copyright owners and apologies are expressed for any omission.

Goswami, D. and P. Stillman. 1987. Reclaiming the Classroom: Teacher Research as an Agency for Change. Boynton/Cook Publishers, a subsidiary of Reed Elsevier, Inc., Portsmouth, NH on p.16; Kemmis, S. and R. McTaggart. 1988. The Action Research Planner. Geelong, Victoria: Deakin University Press on pp.33, 51,112; Somekh, B. 1993. Quality in



Acknowledgements

Educational Research - The Contribution of Classroom Teachers. In Edge, J. and K. Richards (Eds.). Teachers Develop Teachers Research. Macmillan Heinemann Ltd. on pp.33 and 34; McNiff, J. 1988. Action Research: Principles and Practice. Routledge on p.51; Allwright, D. 1993. Integrating 'Research' and 'Pedagogy': Appropriate Criteria and Practical Possibilities. In Edge, J. and K. Richards (Eds.). Teachers Develop Teachers Research. Macmillan Heinemann Ltd. on p.52; Kemmis, S. and R. McTaggart. 1982. The Action Research Planner. Geelong, Victoria: Deakin University Press on pp. 54 and 55; Hitchcock, G. and D. Hughes. 1995. Research and the Teacher. Routledge on pp.71, 72, 136 and 137; Somekh, B. 1994. Inhabiting Each Other's Castles: Towards Knowledge and Mutual Growth Through Collaboration. In Educational Action Research 2. Oxford: Triangle Journals on pp.72 and 73; Kebir, C. 1994. An Action Research Look at the Communication Strategies of Adult Learners. In TESOL Journal 4. Copyright © 1994 by Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. on pp.73 and 177, used with permission; McKernan, J. 1996. Curriculum Action Research. London: Kogan Page Ltd. on pp.89 and 94; Brophy, M. 1995. Helena's Perspective. In C. Riddell (Ed.). Journeys of Reflection. ESL Action Research in TAFE. Office of Training and Further Education and Western Metropolitan College of TAFE, Melbourne, Victoria: Australia, on pp.133 and 134; Koster, P. 1996. In the Mood. In Investigating the Teaching of Grammar. Reports from a Collaborative Action Research Project Conducted by NSW AMES. NSW AMES Occasional Papers Volume 1 Sydney: Program Support and Development Services on pp.141, 142 and 143; Allan, L. 1994. Reflection and Teaching: Co-operative Workshops to Explore Your Experience. Sydney: Adult Literacy Information Office, on pp.147 and 148; Elliot, J. 1991. Action Research for Educational Change. Open University Press on p.186; Winter, R. 1989. Learning from Experience: Principles and Practice in Action Research. The Falmer Press on p.186; Erickson, F. and J. Wilson. 1982. Sights and Sounds of Life in Schools. Research Series 125. College of Education, University of Michigan, on pp.198 and 199; Mazillo, T. 1994. On Becoming a Researcher. In TESOL Journal 4. Copyright © 1994 by Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. on p. 201, used with permission; Calhoun, E.F. 1994. How to Use Action Research in the Self-renewing School. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, on pp.209, 210, 211 and 212; Burns, A. and S. Hood (Eds.). 1995, 1996, 1997. The Teacher's Voice Series and Prospect: A Journal of Australian TESOL. National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research, Macquarie University: Sydney.