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Research in Progress

IATEFL research publications

IATEFL is the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (www.iatefl.org). This report outlines research papers which have appeared in recent IATEFL publications. Four publications are discussed in turn. Three of these were published by the IATEFL Research Special Interest Group (SIG), while the fourth was published by the Young Learners SIG. The range of research reported here reflects the international nature of IATEFL's activities and its commitment to supporting and promoting research within the association. The publications reviewed are available for purchase from IATEFL.

Research News Issue 18

Issue 18 of the Research SIG's publication *Research News* (Burghout 2006) includes papers from the 40th Annual IATEFL Conference in Harrogate, UK. Two of these papers featured in a pre-conference event about doing high-quality research. Shosh Leshem (Oranim School of Education) & Vernon Trafford (Anglia Polytechnic University) focus on quality in planning research. They break the planning process down into six interrelated stages (vision statement, strategy, plan, action, meaning-making and review) and discuss each in turn. Keith Richards (University of Warwick) then examines quality in qualitative research; his key argument is that quality in research depends ultimately not on procedures, but on researchers themselves. In addition to what he calls awareness of the self, to enhance the quality of their work qualitative researchers also need, he suggests, to recognize the challenges of qualitative research, to understand the criteria by which research is judged, to be familiar with data collection and analytical procedures, and to be dedicated to the craft of research.

This publication contains five other research papers. Tim Graham & Alice Oxholm (both Sheffield Hallam University) report on their experiences of promoting research with MA TESOL students. One key finding in this work is that the experience of doing research led to more positive attitudes towards research among the course participants; this was despite the fact the teachers found research challenging to do. Leonardo Mack (Cabgoc Learning & Development Centre) studied independent learning in Angola, concluding from his questionnaire with 40 learners that they were very teacher-dependent, and offering some suggestions for how independent learning might be more widely promoted.

The remaining three papers examine aspects of classroom discourse. Alan Fortune (King's College) analyzed advanced learners' use of metalanguage during collaborative dictogloss activities; a key finding here was that the use of metalanguage and metalinguistic terms by learners during these activities was crucial to the co-construction of language output. Mirosław Pawlak (State College of Higher Professional Education, Konin) was also interested in interaction among learners; he examined negotiation of form and meaning in 112

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audio-recorded pair- and group-work activities involving Polish secondary school learners of English. Only 74 instances of negotiated interaction were identified in these activities, leading to the conclusion that negotiation of form and meaning is likely to be infrequent in situations where students have access to a shared L1. In the next paper, Linda Taylor & Shan Fu (both Nottingham Trent University) examined classroom data and interviews to analyze the purpose of the follow-up-move in the Initiation-Response-Follow-Up (IRF) classroom discourse patterns of Chinese teachers of English. This study found an absence of discoursal feedback; that is, teachers' follow-up consisted of brief comments such as 'ok' which did not attempt to elaborate or extend on learners' contributions.

Research News Issue 19

Issue 19 of *Research News* (Mohammadi 2007) contains two articles. The first, by Gospel Ikpeme (Grand Educational Consultancy, Nigeria), investigates teachers' perceptions of the use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) in teacher professional development courses. He found that teachers valued CMC, particularly because of the opportunities it offered them for interaction with other teachers. They believed that CMC was effective in creating a collegial context among individuals who were participating on a web-based teacher development course and that it encouraged participants to collaborate and learn from each other.

The paper by Anthony Bruton (University of Seville) analyzes the variations which exist in instruments currently used in assessing targeted vocabulary learning in written discourse. He discusses different ways of quantifying lexical knowledge (mainly through the receptive/productive distinction) and argues that the instruments used to assess vocabulary knowledge will reflect assumptions about the nature of vocabulary and the way vocabulary knowledge is stored. His view is that 'receptive and productive vocabulary knowledges are activated in completely different ways; from form-to-meaning, via the ears/eyes, and from meaning-to-form, via the mouth/hands' (p. 10). This, therefore, has implications for the way receptive and productive vocabulary should be assessed.

Research News Issue 20

Issue 20 of *Research News* (Falcao & Fortune 2007) comprises ten papers from a conference entitled 'Action Research: Rewards and Challenges', which was organized by the Research SIG in Croatia. The papers by Adrian Underhill (UK), Julian Edge (University of Manchester) and Herbert Altrichter (Johannes Kepler University) are based on their plenary talks at this conference and cover conceptual issues of relevance to action research; Božana Kneževič (University of Rijeka), additionally, discusses the notions of reflection, reflexivity and redescription and their role in action research; the remaining papers, which we overview below, report empirical research involving action research conducted in Italy, Croatia, Slovenia, the UK and Japan.

Anna Franca Plastina (University of Calabria) discusses her work with teacher researchers in Italy who were learning to use the COLT (Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching) observation scheme to support analyses of their own classroom practices. The paper highlights both the challenges this process involved (e.g. developing a non-judgemental

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approach to classroom observation) as well as the benefits experienced by the teacher researchers (e.g. greater self-awareness).

Irena Milanič (University of Primorska) conducted action research in the context of an ESP course for history students in Slovenia. Her particular focus was on exploring ways of increasing students' involvement in lessons and improving the quality of their homework assignments. She documents how she examined these issues and presents findings which suggest some degree of success. Mojca Belak (University of Ljubljana) also conducted her study in Slovenia; she experimented with the notion of the class as a learning organization and reports on the impact this had on her work and her university students. Through diaries, interviews and observation, she found that introducing learning organization principles (e.g. all members of the group are equal, including the teacher) developed in her students more responsible attitudes towards learning English.

The paper by Jill Morris (Nottingham Trent University) in this collection is a case study of the introduction of a new intensive language programme at a British university. Using questionnaires, interviews and stimulus recall, she analyzed teachers' attitudes to this course and its implementation. The findings suggested that teachers' initial views of the course were negative; they did not feel that they were sufficiently involved in the thinking behind the innovation (i.e. the new course) nor that its introduction was managed in a particularly effective way.

The two final papers in this collection report action research from Japan and Croatia respectively. In the first, Sanae Tsuda (Tokai Gakuen University) examined the impact on her learners of learning to write short stories in English. Through questionnaires, observation and analyses of students' writing, she concluded that her learners found short story writing stimulating and that it increased their interest in learning English. Arijana Krišković & Ksenija Baždarič (both University of Rijeka) used a questionnaire to evaluate a medical English university course which had been re-designed in line with the Bologna principles (these are principles for establishing convergence among higher education programmes in Europe – for more details, see http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/). One key innovation in the course was the introduction of oral presentations as a form of assessment; reactions to this were mixed, with less than half the 158 students surveyed reporting that they felt that it was a useful way of helping them learn English. Overall, though, the authors report positive attitudes in students towards the new course.

Teachers and young learners: Research in our classrooms

This publication (Mitchell-Schuitevoerder & Mourão 2006) was published to celebrate the 20th birthday of IATEFL's Young Learner Special Interest Group. Looking back at the development of this area, the editors of the volume note how there is still minimal research as to what happens in young learner classrooms. The volume is, therefore, dedicated to showcasing teacher-led research in such contexts.

This collection of papers begins with Annie Hughes (University of York) emphasizing the need for small-scale classroom research as an important aspect of both educational practice and professional development. Her paper is complemented by that by Shelagh Rixon (University of York), which urges teachers to extend the range of young learner

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research carried out, in terms of its purposes, the type of data collected and the ways in which the data are analyzed.

In addition to these two overviews, there are seven teacher-led research projects reported in the volume. Wendy Arnold (Hong Kong) investigated the implementation of project work with monolingual Cantonese speakers. Her findings indicate that students liked working with projects, and teachers seemed to value project work. Some of her findings show the importance of learner training and the role that freedom in the selection of project topic plays in achieving better outcomes. In addition, she found that boys did better on projects in mixed-gender groups rather than in same-gender groups, except when IT (information technology) was included in the project.

Kay Bentley (UK) reports on her investigation of the linguistic problems which seemed to be interfering with the overall school behaviour of a young Chinese immigrant to the Netherlands. These problems were closely related to the effect of the learner's mother tongue, and the researcher thus planned an intervention to help the learner and his teacher become aware of these issues and to identify strategies for addressing them. The study reports improvements in the learner's productive skills as a result of the intervention.

Teresa Fleta (Spain) reports on her longitudinal research of young Spanish children's linguistic development in L2 and compares it with that recorded in the literature for young L2 learners of various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Her findings support the idea of the existence of developmental stages for the acquisition of English as an L2, which are similar for learners regardless of mother tongue and learning environment.

The papers by Sandie Mourão (Portugal) and Penelope Robinson (University of Leeds) focus on reading. Mourão looked at the strategies pre-school children used in order to understand authentic English picture books and whether repetition within the story affected these strategies. She compared the effects of two storybooks, one of which included high levels of repetition and one which had very little. Mourão identified the following six strategies that children employed: commenting on the illustrations, translating words or chunks of script, imitation and repetition, connecting the story to their own experiences, repeating a discussed topic, and commenting/reflecting on the story's script. Repetition played a significant role in that when it was present the students were able to acquire the language of the script with ease, whereas when it was absent the students had difficulties in doing so.

Robinson focused on the shared reading approach and the way it has been adopted in EFL methodology. She argues that there needs to be a principled EFL or MFL (modern foreign language) approach rather than a simple adoption of the way shared reading is used in L1 classes. She reported on research currently in progress which explores different techniques for shared reading as well as the kinds of language knowledge and skills which can be effectively learnt through this pedagogical procedure.

Rosemary Smeets (Switzerland) presents an action research project dealing with the effect of learning styles on vocabulary acquisition. She examined whether students would acquire vocabulary more easily if it was taught using their preferred learning styles. She used a control/experimental group design and after identifying the students' learning styles and establishing a baseline vocabulary, she engaged the experimental group in vocabulary learning games based on the students' preferred learning styles. The results showed that students do

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learn more words when using their preferred learning styles (5% increase compared to control group), a finding which has important implications for teachers.

Nicole Taylor (Spain) investigated teachers' attitudes towards the use of mother tongue in L2 classes. She also looked at when and for what purposes a group of 11–12-year-old Spanish- and Catalan-speaking students were using their L1 in class. The teachers questioned in this study reported that they used the L1 mostly for affective reasons and classroom management but they felt that they should insist on students speaking only English in class. Taylor investigated use of the L1 during pair work and found that students would differentiate between the content of the discourse – which they thought should be in the L2 – and conversational discourse strategies (e.g. asking for help, moving the conversation on), which they carried out in the L1. The L1 was also used to compensate for gaps in the L2. The researcher intervened by raising awareness of this issue and providing language input which catered to the students' observed needs.

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The European Centre for Modern Languages: Recent projects

The hallmark of the Council of Europe's European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) is the organisation of international language education projects within four-year programmes. Coordinated by European teams, these projects primarily target language experts involved in national and international developments, in associations and in institutions working to enhance standards in language education.

Based on the underlying values of the Council of Europe and its pioneering work in cultural cooperation and language education, the ECML works in cooperation with the Council's Language Policy Division, which develops tools and standards for transparent and coherent language policies. In contrast, and complementary to this, the ECML concentrates on the level of educational practice.

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