TEACHER AS RESEARCHER AND EVALUATOR - ONE SUGGESTED SOLUTION TO SOME RECURRENT PROBLEMS IN ELT AND ESP

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Introduction

I should like in this article to discuss what I regard as three fairly major problems in ELT and suggest a means by which we may help to solve them. The problems are inter-related and I think general to most ELT (and indeed educational) contexts. I have deliberately specified ELT rather than ESP because I do not wish to start making too early on what may be unnecessary distinctions between ELT and ESP, though given the context in which this paper is being written +, I shall be using a number of examples and illustrations from ESP situations from ESP situations. The three problems I want to talk about are firstly the relatively powerless recipient role of the teacher in the educational planning process, secondly, the gap between much research and what actually happens in classrooms, and thirdly the paucity of evaluation studies in ELT and ESP. My solution involves a fundamental extension of the teacher's role in the classroom and outside it, from one of participant in the classroom (is the 'nominal' role of the teacher) to that of active researcher in the teaching and learning process.

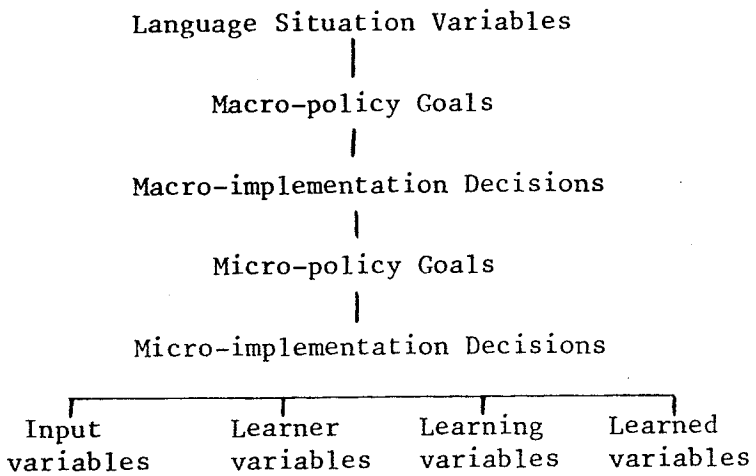
The first problem

I have outlined elsewhere (Kennedy 1982) a rough hierarchy of planning decisions concerning language, moving from those taken by governments (the highest level), to those taken by Ministries, by regional authorities, educational establishments, departments, and finally (the lowest level), to those taken

+ This is an updated and extended version of a talk given at the 1982 National ESP Conference in Vitória, Brazil.

in the classroom by teachers. (There is by the way no sense of a value judgment attached to my use of the terms 'high' and 'low' levels in this context -I refer simply to sequential stages in an orthodox top to bottom process of planning). The point I want to make here is that by the time the chain of decision-making reaches the teacher, a large number of important decisions have been taken and implemented normally without any consultation, even though those decisions will cru cially effect what he does in the classroom. Moreover, the expectation on the part of decision-makers further up the hierarchy that the teacher should provide any feedback on the consequences of those decisions is low.

Similar conclusions can be drawn from Tollefson's (1981) table below illustrating the connections between the 'high' and 'low' levels in the language planning process.



The table illustrates policy goals and their implementation resulting from a particular language situation. Tollefson attempts to describe the effect policy decisions have on certain acquisition variables such as input (eg what language to teach), the learner (eg motivation), learning (eg factors in the curriculum), and content (eg what is actually learnt). Links

between the different levels may break down so that for example syllabi may be produced and materials designed higher up the system with little reference to the ultimate source of implementation, the teacher. Little interest may be shown once the materials have been taught, except perhaps at the general level of numbers of students passing or failing norm-referenced achievement tests, for which the teacher is held accountable, despite the fact, as I hope I have demonstrated, that many of the decisions influencing the pass rate may have been taken outside the classroom by someone other than the teacher. A general picture emerges then of the teacher as recipient of resources, implementing higher level decisions and only making decisions himself, within the hierarchy, in the 'low-level' classroom, in the areas of methods and technique. (I do not wish to suggest the teacher's role is therefore a simple one; it is of course complex as anyone who sets out to describe what happens in classroom finds).

In ESP I recognise the situation in which the teacher is presented with materials to teach may not always and many teachers will design their own materials. Indeed Swales (1980) has pointed out there may even be a professional rather than a strictly pedagogic pressure to produce materials even though they may not be necessary. To have designed his own materials become an indispensable part of the ESP teacher's 'qualifications'. Swales points out that this has led to duplication and the neglect of fundamental areas of ESP research. But I think there may be other reasons why the ESP teacher designs his own materials. The ESP programme has probably been initiated by someone higher in the hierarchy, either at Ministerial or Faculty level, probably with no thought having been given to the provision of materials. The ESP teacher may then ask for materials, but there is unlikely to be a budget specifically for this purpose, and in any case office procedures and/or exchange regulations make ordering a time-consuming and slow process. The teacher is left to his own devices to manage as best as he can. So his reaction may be to write materials, but by default, be

cause it is the only solution to his problem. I do not want to paint too blanck a picture here. Some might say that the teacher who has the freedom to design his own materials with no interference from a central authority is fortunate indeed. The point I am making is that this freedom has not been consciously granted nor is it an option the teacher has chosen. It is a consequence of his being at the bottom of the decision-making hierarchy. Nor can the teacher take advantage of this freedom, since the same people who have unwittingly bestowed it on him, have probably not provided him with any training for the task of materials design. (Many non-native speaker ESP teachers come to the job after a University degree in English literature with minimal, if any, language training).

Cases exist of course, especially in the context of overseas aid, where projects are set up to produce materials for a specific situation,and it might be thought that teachers could play a major role. But such projects are invariably initiated by 'outsiders', not the local teacher, and he tends once again to remain in a recipient role and generally play a minor part in what often become a major research undertaking. I am not decrying the various materials projects that have taken or are taking place. Many have been excellent examples of applied linguistics in action, and they have increased our knowledge of ESP project management and design and produced innovative and much-needed materials. I am thinking particularly of the Reading and Thinking (1979) and Skills for Learning (1980) series. It may indeed be that such materials projects and materials are necessary and useful to give a 'boost' to an ESP unit locally, (though I would be interested to see an evaluation some years after the project), and they certainly have a valuable function in a more international context of focussing current applied linguistic research and pushing along ELT and ESP development. But they tend to be high prestige projects, often funded by agencies who want a return on the investment, they draw on highly qualified expatriate expertise, and they have the clear objective of

producing a book of materials which may eventually be marketed internationally. Such projects are complex and high-risk operations, and in the process,the local teacher, the 'insider' seems to get lost. The problem has been recognised and a well-managed project can achieve a degree of local teacher involvement (Sinclair 1983). However, I would argue that the nature and objectives of such projects work against teacher involvement which only takes place at best in a minor way,and at worst cosmetically. Some other process needs to be put into operation if our objective of teacher involvement is to be achieved.

To summarise this stage of the argument, the table below from Davis.(1980) helps to highlight the problem and begins to indicate a means of solving it. The table was originally designed for use in evaluation studies, but it is useful for the present purpose of illuminating the teacher's role in curriculum development and materials design.

QUESTIONS	INSIDERS	OUTSIDERS	INSIDERS/ OUTSIDERS
Who initiates the programme/project?	A	D	G
Who owns it?	B	E	H
Who does it?	C	F	I

(the letters in the table are for ease of reference only).

'Insiders' in this context are teachers in an institution; 'outsiders' all others. It is my argument that in the case of most projects in ELT and ESP, 'outsiders' initiate, own, and 'do' the project (categories D,E,F).

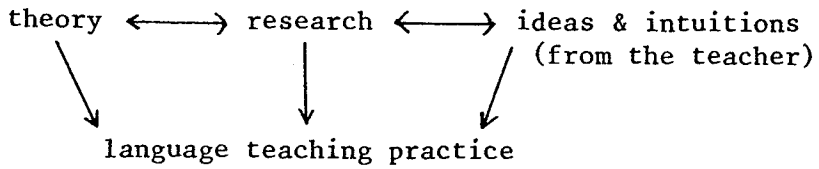
The ideal is represented by categories A, B, and C, with teachers initiating, owning, and 'doing' the project. In most cases of course, it will be necessary to operate an intermediate stage of co-operation between outsiders and insiders, with each acknowl

edging they have skills that can help the other. Many variations are possible and there will be areas of overlap, but the categorisation serves as a useful indicator of degree of involvement of insiders and outsiders. The argument in this section of the paper is that the more situations are classified as DEF, the more powerless a teacher will be, and the more therefore we need to find ways to alter the situation to approach an ABC, or at least a GHI situation.

The second problem

Now let me turn to the second problem which you will remember was the gap between linguistic research and classrooms practice. One aspect of this second problem is closely associated with the first since much linguistic research treats the teacher as recipient rather than participant and presents findings on a 'take-it-or-leave-it' basis. The situation is being remedied with a number of publishers producing handbooks for the teacher which integrate the results of research and present them in a form acceptable to teachers. However the basic problem remains. Much research cannot be applied directly or needs considerable knowledge and expertise to be reformulated so that it can. One of the reasons for this of course is that academics have different aims and purposes from those that might at first sight interest the teacher. In addition academics write for their academic peers, often publish in journals not normally accessible to teachers, and assume considerable shared knowledge on the part of the teacher. Another reason may be the particular tension in applied linguistics between pedagogy and content (Stern 1981), not shared to the same extent by other subjects, where subject content and subject pedagogy tend to be divided. Thus, in history or science, two different groups of researchers are responsible for content and pedagogy respectively, with the teacher-training function primarily concerned with pedagogy rather than pure research. In ELT, certainly in Britain, the case is different, with many departments respon-

sible both for language pedagogy and content research into language. This system of course has many advantage, but it can lead to theoretical research presented to teachers who feel the need for more pedagogic-based investigations. Krashen (1982) has recognised the problem and has proposed a 3-way approach which would allow a teacher role in research.



However, this procedures seems to recognise the teacher's experience as a practitioner, not as a potential participant in research - he still stands outside it - but at least Krashen has formally introduced a feedback role for the teacher.

Two problems have now been stated: the system tends to produce powerless teachers who have to accept higher-level decisions rather than influence them, and who are passive recipients and indeed sometimes objects of research which can be of a distancing, theoretical nature. We needed a means of making the teacher more powerful and of creating a two-way flow to foster greater communication between researcher and teacher.

The third problem

Now let me turn to the third problem, concerning evaluation. I have singled this out because (a) it is a fundamental but neglected area of ELT, and (b) it is an area in which teachers can play an effective research role, thereby contributing to a solution of the first and second problems I have already discussed.

The literature in ELT is sadly lacking in reported evaluation studies, particularly surprising in ESP contexts, where clients may be committing large sums to training. In the case of ELT projects, this may be

the problem. already mentioned,of materials production becoming an end in itself. The end product (a 'book' of materials) is the evaluation of a project's success, and once the course is produced and perhaps published internationally the project is deemed successful. It is not felt necessary, for example, to return to the scene and evaluate how the course is being taught,what problems are being experienced, and what changes might be made to materials: once produced the materials tend to fossilise. This is often a case of lack of finance. Few sponsors are willing to commit funds to evaluation once the project has 'finished'. This disinterest in evaluation is also apparent in small-scale projects. Reports on materials and methodology often conclude with general statements about success, but the focus of such reports is rarely on evaluation, and much more on the genesis and description of materials. Little hard evidence is produced to substantiate the claims that are made, and there is a distinct preference for reporting success rather than failure, despite the fact that we could learn as much from a study of the latter as from the former. More rigorous evaluation studies would help to remedy these problem. Some evaluation reports do exist (eg Mackay 1981, Bachman 1981),but these concern for the most par large-scale evaluations in which the teacher, amongst others, is being evaluated by outsiders. There is, as I have already said, a need for such studies, but the argument I wish to put forward here is that there should be much more 'insider' evaluation by the teacher himself.

We have now isolated three problems - the recipient role of the teacher, the lack of 'fit' between much theory and practice, with a resultant lack of contact between researcher and teacher, and a lack of evaluation studies. My proposal for a possible solution, or at, least an easing of the problem, concerns the role of the teacher as action research and evaluator.

Teacher as action research and evaluator

I want to suggest that we should create conditions whereby the teacher himself undertakes research

in his classroom which can feedback into his own teaching and so create the possibility for self-renewal so important for teaching. This is the not unfamiliar notion at least in educational circles of action research (Rudduck and Hopkins 1985). If we were to try to apply this approach to ELT, a number of the problem outlined above might be alleviated. Firstly, by undertaking research, the teacher should become more knowledgeable about his situation, more able to defend his pedagogic actions, and perhaps more influential in higher-level decision-making. Secondly, the connection between pure and applied research should be strengthened. Sinclair (1978) draws the distinction between on-line research. Off-line research is largely pure research and not necessarily linked to classrooms, which is both its strength and its weakness. It demands considerable time and expertise and will continue to be done by outsiders. It is of vital importance this type of research continue as only that way can the very basic theoretical problems in ELT/ESP be solved. The teacher (given his work situation) is more likely to be able and willing to conduct on-line research more closely associated with the classroom and the link between theory and practice will be more explicit. The teacher brings many advantages to this type of research: he probably shares the students' mother tongue and he knows intimately the teaching context and his learners.

Now where in the learning process might the theacher contribute? ESP in particular has to a large extent been concerned with input-output studies. Thus a course has stated objectives and the product (language performance) is measured against these objectives. Increasingly, attention is being turned to the process of learning and teaching, crudely to what happens between the input and the output (Long 1984), the interaction between teacher, student and materials. It is in this area especially that the teacher can undertake research which can feed back into his own teaching and the learning of his students.

Let me give three examples of the sort of research I mean. (I shall not go into the details of the

research findings since I am more interested in this paper in the type of activity the research represents).

In the first example the researchers (Cohen et al. 1979) wanted to find out what reading problems their students were experiencing across a wide variety of subject texts, including history, biology and political science. The research group, composed of both teachers and researchers, adopted a straightforward methodology, asking students to underline words with which they were having difficulty, and setting comprehension questions designed to test interpretation of the texts used. Afterwards, students were interviewed (in their L1) and the discussions tape-recorded for later analysis. As a result, the team was able to identify student difficulties in grammar and vocabulary and also point out differences between native and non-native readers of English.

A second piece of research, although 'academic' in that it formed the basis of a thesis, illustrates the type of research that teachers could usefully undertake. This is the now well-known research by Hosenfeld (1977) who compared the reading strategies of good and bad readers. She found that good readers tended to keep the meaning of a text in mind as they read, processed large chunks and skipped unimportant words, while bad readers adopted reverse strategies. Her methodology was to get readers to talk about their reading and their processing of the text as they read.

My third example is the description of an attempt to introduce a more communicative approach to students used to a fairly traditional teachercentred methodology (Hutchinson and Klepac 1982). The methodology involved group work and learner presentations. After evaluation of the method by means of questionnaire, observation and discussion with the students, the writers came to the conclusion that the innovation had failed to be accepted by the learners, a failure attributed in part at least to the influences of the existing cultural norms with which the method conflicted.

The three examples together illustrate a number

of points relevant to the concept of teacher as action research and evaluator. They all represent examples of qualitative research that in many ways is more feasible for a teacher to carry out: the 'case study' approach whereby individuals rather than large groups are selected for investigation utilises the teacher's intimate knowledge of his class. All three studies also involved the student directly in the research. This is a delicate area in which again the teacher's relationship with him class and his knowledge of their culture and language becomes important. Two of the studies also involved the teacher directly in the research with the help of an outside collaborator, and they were all concerned to a greater or lesser extent with the process of learning, with what happens between the input and the output. In addition, although only the third example was intended as an evaluation of teaching, the remaining two instances could have been used in evaluation studies. Thus, the first case could have been used in materials evaluation to see what problems were occurring; the second, to see how students attempted to overcome difficulties. The third example, as we have seen, was set up as an evaluation, the results of which would be fed back to provide the basis for a more successful strategy for change.

Conclusion

I hope I have illustrated in this paper why teachers should begin to involve themselves and their students in action research and the role that evaluation might play in this type of activity. I have left many issues untouched. More needs to be said on how to get teachers involved in action research and the problems that can occur while engaged in it. These aspects must await another occasion.

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