

On Wearing Two Hats: Practitioner Researcher and Doctoral Researcher

Susan Dawson, The University of Manchester

Research Context

This reflection is based on extracts from the journal I kept during the data collection period of a doctoral project. I was one of two EAP (English for Academic Purposes) teachers on a 10-week, full-time English for University Studies Course. The course was for potential Masters students and I taught them for 8 hours per week. The research took place in a private Further Education institution in the UK.

Doctoral Student
EP as methodology

The Seven Principles of Exploratory Practice (EP)

1. Put 'quality of life' first.
2. Work primarily to understand language classroom life.
3. Involve everybody.
4. Work to bring people together.
5. Work also for mutual development.
6. Integrate the work for understanding into classroom practice.
7. Make the work a continuous enterprise.

(Allwright 2003: 128-130)

EAP Practitioner
EP as pedagogy

My Story...

I had been teaching for many years and using the principles of Exploratory Practice (EP) in my classes for a few years. I felt comfortable in my role as a practitioner researcher in my own classroom and confident of the benefits of EP to the learners and myself. I did not expect the fact that this was a doctoral project to really impinge on the 10 weeks. I could not have been more naive or mistaken ...

Guilt and doubts

So far, I have relegated it [the EP work] to the last hour of class. Is that right? It's almost as if we do the 'proper' work and then do the research. Even though experience shows me that this is useful and good for students, I still feel slightly guilty about using class time for it ... about the guilt of doing EP for my own purposes.

(Week 2)

Pre-battle jitters

So it all begins today! I feel excited, apprehensive and nervous all at the same time. Excited because I'm really collecting the data at last, nervous in case I've forgotten something, the class doesn't gel or like me, they don't get what we're doing or, perhaps because this is it - that I've forgotten something, not thought things through well enough or will get to the end and wish I'd done it another way.

(Week 1, Day 1)

Crunch Point
'The EP work isn't helpful'
said the learners
(Week 6)

Conflict of interests

I then set them analysing their own data, but didn't have much of a chance to really go round the groups and see how they were doing as I needed to speak to Monzer [a 17 minute 'interview' in class for research purposes].

(Week 5, Day 10)

Is this the end
of the PhD?

Questioning my integrity

I think that perhaps what is really getting to me is that I do feel somehow a failure as a teacher. I feel a bit of a fraud - both as a teacher and a researcher.

(Week 6)

Faltering allegiances

Also a crisis of confidence in EP in terms of its usefulness for this sort of thing. Have I been deluded? Is this really a positive thing to do?

(Week 6, Day 11)

Creative tensions

I think I am actually feeling quite constrained by the research agenda ... am still struggling to find a way to fit the EP stuff in naturally. I seem to have so much I need to do with them and it's making it all fit together in a coherent way.

(Week 3, Day 5)

To record or not?

Didn't record the conversations, which is a shame, but didn't want it to seem as if I was only interested in their feedback because of the PhD.

(Week 6, Day 12)

Desecrating the EP principles?

I also feel as if I am violating some of the EP principles: Quality of Life - if I continue doggedly with this, what does that mean for the students and our lives together in the classroom? Work co-operatively for mutual benefit - there seems to be no perceived benefit for some in this. Am I misusing my power as teacher?

(Week 6, day 12)

Losing the plot?

I feel as if I am second guessing their reactions all the time. Would I be as sensitive if I wasn't doing EP with them for the PhD?

(Week 8, Day 15)

Artwork:
'The Colosseum'
by Tiffany Dawson

BATTLING IT OUT IN THE ARENA

Reference
Allwright, D. (2003). Exploratory Practice: Rethinking practitioner research in language teaching. *Language Teaching Research*, 7(2), 113-141.