



Irish Research Scheme for Teaching 2017-18

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Launching the Trinity Irish Research Scheme for Teaching 2017-18

This document marks the launch of the Irish Research Scheme for Teaching. It is a project that has been a long time in the making, and one that will, in time, lead to a greater focus on academic enquiry and collaboration across the teaching spectrum. The initial focus of this project is in the arena of English Language Teaching but it is hoped that wider participation from the teaching community will be encouraged.

This research scheme is an independent, not-for-profit project designed to encourage teachers to take control of their own professional development through the means of academic research. It is modelled on similar schemes which are in progress in the UK and in Australia (see appendix 1) to which the creation and structure of this scheme draws heavily. Both of these projects have been very successful in aiding the professionalization of the language teaching industry in their respective countries and it is hoped that this scheme will be of similar value to Ireland.

This scheme will be sponsored for its inaugural year by Trinity College London. They will provide academic aid to participants, as required in the shape of Ben Beaumont, and will also provide much-needed advice and support to those of us organising it.

What has been done?

2016-17 saw a pilot project of the Irish Research Scheme, run as a sort of trial before this inaugural year. The process and documentation for this scheme is detailed in Final Appendix.

The pilot scheme was a resounding success, with the four fantastic research projects completed and included in this document. Three of these projects will be presented at the ELT Ireland Annual Conference in 2017.

What's next?

This project is open to any teachers in Ireland who wish to avail of it. Participation is encouraged from all, with no project too small or insignificant, and no level of research experience deemed insufficient. The project will run from March 2017 until the ELT Ireland Annual Conference in February 2018.

Why should I do this?

This project is intended to support teachers who wish to take control of their own development and to develop their ability to successfully evaluate their own teaching react to this evaluation.

The IRST and Trinity College London will provide an initial day of training in basic research skills at the beginning of your project to help you frame your questions.

You will then be put with, or can choose, a supervisor for your project who can help guide and advise you if needed.

There will be a structured timetable of drafting and proposals to help you shape your project and add depth to your reflection.

There will be a focus on creating a research document and speaker proposal for the ELT Ireland Annual Conference 2018.

Does this sound like something you or your colleagues would be interested in? Projects can be undertaken by individuals or even teams.

For further information, or to register your interest:

IRSTprojects@gmail.com

[@IrishRST](#)

irishresearchschemeforteaching.wordpress.com

Chris Farrell

Head of Teacher Development

Centre of English Studies Ireland and the UK

To investigate the effectiveness of questioning in the classroom and suggest improvements

By Gavin Reddin

Teacher Trainer

Centre of English Studies

Supervised by

Chris Farrell

Head of Teacher Development,

Centre of English Studies

Gavin is a teacher, teacher trainer, and Cambridge examiner. I've been teaching in a variety of contexts for over 10 years. I was previously a secondary school teacher of English and History before moving into ELT. I have lived in Paris and Prague. My main areas of interest are Teacher Development, Assessment for Learning, and the Lexical approach to teaching.

Online at: @ReddinGavin

Abstract:

This project has three primary aims: to discover what kind of questions are being asked in the classroom by teachers at CES; to ascertain a degree of justification for the choices made in choosing these questions; to uncover any issues arising from the choices being made with regards questioning in the classroom and attempt to suggest possible solutions. This project has involved the participation of teaching staff with a wide range of experience and qualifications. Among the data collection methods used in this study were questionnaires, audio recordings, video recordings, and script. From an analysis of this data, allied with research in the field and the researchers own extensive experience, this project will attempt to suggest ways of making questioning in the ELT classroom more effective.

Introduction:

One of the most important areas of teaching centres around the skill of questioning. Effective teacher questioning techniques provide students and teachers with an opportunity to engage in dialogue, to arouse the curiosity of the student and motivate them in a variety of ways. It can stimulate their

imagination and encourage them to seek out further knowledge. Questioning also provides useful information to the teacher in clarifying the understanding of instructions and in finding out their students' current state of knowledge.

I wanted to do this project for a number of reasons. As a teacher trainer on PRESET courses, I was worried that we trainers weren't focusing enough on ensuring our trainees become effective questioners in the classroom. I have been observing trainees for a number of years and have been left with the distinct impression that our CELT training course is neglecting this area. This feeling has been reinforced when observing qualified teachers with varying degrees of experience; from newly qualified teachers to those with over a decade of teaching experience. I have concluded that the use of questioning is often overlooked in PRESET courses and by professionals in the field, and that for many teachers questioning has become a routine that has not been developed. As questioning is an integral part of teaching, it is important to know why we teachers are asking questions and to ensure that they are effective.

Issues that have arisen from research:

1. What type of information are we looking to elicit from learners?

When planning lessons, it seems clear from the data I have collected that teachers are not clear about what to ask their students. Have teachers integrated questions into their lesson plan? Are teachers looking for information that students can recall from previous lessons? Are they looking for information that students already know? Are they looking for a summary of what has been learnt, heard, read, or watched? This was an issue that arose when analysing my research findings. Ineffective questioning can arise from teachers not thinking clearly enough about the type of information they are looking for from their students (Cashin, 1995; Nilson, 2010).

2. What responses would we like from our learners?

When we ask questions, we are eliciting a response, and this means we need to think about our learners' responses. Some of the participants in this research project are not thinking enough about what responses they would like and what exactly they are using questioning for? Are we thinking clearly enough about how we respond to our students' answers?

3. How much importance do we place on the wording of questions?

From my own observations during research, I have noted the significant impact that wording has on how learners respond and what information we as teachers can elicit. During teacher training observations and from my research findings, I have noted the preponderance of "What is...?" questions. I have noted from my observations that such questions reveal very little about learners' understanding, and they don't encourage much discussion or reasoning. It also gives learners little opportunity to explore ideas or make mistakes. Learners are limited in the range of possible answers they can give by being asked such questions (Jarvis, 2005).

4. Are we using enough directional words?

Directional words are words which direct the learners in how they should frame their responses.

For example: “What is socialism?” is looking for a specific answer, whereas “What might socialism be?” allows for a range of possible examples. Directional questions can lead learners to reason, analyse, assess, and examine. (Hamblen, 1988). It is quite clear from my research that while some directional words are used, they are not being utilized enough to accommodate creative and thoughtful responses.

5. Am I making knowledge provisional?

From my research, it's evident that teachers are not taking the opportunity to make knowledge provisional, we teachers can elicit detailed information from students concerning what they think and why they think it, but not enough of these types of questions are being asked. By asking such questions, this can allow teachers to be flexible and to adjust their teaching. Teachers can then ask further questions, or offer counter-examples, or seek justification.

How can we make knowledge provisional?

- It can be achieved through reshaping traditional questions and using key words such as ‘may’, ‘could’, ‘would’
- Question stems such as: ‘Can you think of some different possibilities?’ ‘What different answers might be possible?’ (Gershon, 2013)

6. Why do we sometimes get no response?

Many of the teachers I interviewed have expressed frustration when they often find themselves in the position of asking a question and getting no response. I have surveyed a variety of students at CES to ask them why they sometimes do not respond to their teacher’s questions, and I discovered that there were a variety of reasons for this:

- They didn’t understand the question being asked
- They didn’t know the answer
- They don’t want the attention from the other students
- They weren’t paying attention
- They don’t want to look foolish if they get the answer wrong

The research literature in this area (Ainley, 1987; Ramsey, et al., 1991) suggests ways of avoiding this frustrating experience:

- Avoid questions that require a single, direct answer, such as: ‘What is the capital city of Mongolia?’

At times, these questions are unavoidable, but from my research, teachers rely too much on these kinds of questions, and they tend to discourage most students from responding.

- Use questions that invite learners to talk about what they think: “What do you know about Mongolia?”

Here the stakes are much lower. There is no one right answer; and it also invites learners to share their thoughts with the teacher (Gershon, 2013).

- Ask students to talk with their partner first. By giving them time to discuss it in pairs, you alleviate two key problems: social awkwardness of being the first person to speak; the numerical imbalance between teachers and students.

We encourage trainees on our teacher training course at CES to stand in front of the class and centre themselves; but who is to answer the question? In this scenario we are setting up the class as a unit because we are speaking to all the learners at the same time, but they cannot answer as a unit. It is very unlikely that one learner will take it upon themselves to respond, and if they do, what do we as teachers really want? If one learner answers, are we gaining any concrete evidence as to the other learners' thinking or understanding?

If teachers want concrete evidence of what their learners are thinking or reasoning, then encouraging students to write something down by using instructions such as:

“Note down some thoughts about the question.”

“Make some notes about your response to the question.”

“What might X be? Make a note of your thoughts.” (Sackstein, 2015; Gershon, 2013)

7. Do I give students enough thinking time?

The research I conducted with my colleagues (see appendices) suggests that teachers are unsure as to how much wait time is required. There are a couple of reasons for this:

- Some teachers never even thought of giving learners time. They always expected a quick response
- Some teachers are afraid of silences thinking it may undermine their authority
- Some teachers tend to ask questions in quick succession

Asking questions and waiting will give learners time to think. It allows learners to analyse the question, perhaps in their own language, and then consider a response to give, but teachers must routinize wait time into their lesson and ensure learners are aware of this.

If teachers get into the habit of saying: “Thirty seconds thinking time”, then that fear of silence will soon evaporate (Stahl, 1990).

Conclusion:

How can a teacher become a good questioner?

When trainees finish their PRESET courses and move into the world of teaching, how many of them have acquired the skilful art of questioning? Have PRESET courses prepared them adequately for this vital part of teaching? Teachers need to have a knowledge base of the questioning techniques. It is doubtful that this knowledge is acquired on PRESET courses as it takes time to master the art of questioning and to become familiar with the key phrases or terms in the taxonomy. Many of the teachers I have spoken to are not familiar with Higher-order thinking and Lower-order thinking questions. Higher-order thinking skills are reflected by the top three levels in Bloom's Taxonomy:

Analyzing, Evaluating, and Creating, whereas Lower-order thinking skills are reflected by the lower three levels in Bloom's Taxonomy: Remembering, Understanding, and Applying.

- It is vital that teachers gradually build up their knowledge of the taxonomy. To begin, teachers can select five to six terms or questions, and practise using them in the classrooms. As the teacher becomes familiar with them, they can be increased gradually.
- Teachers must also give time in their class for using higher-order thinking questions. This will allow students to become more independent learners and thinkers.
- If teachers are asking challenging questions, they must learn to facilitate thoughtful silence. This will create more reflective learners.
- Teachers should become more confident in exploring student responses. Telling the student that they have given an incorrect answer and then moving on is a great missed opportunity. The exploration process into a students' thinking can lead to further clarification, and it also encourages students to contribute while opening other avenues of inquiry.

Issues for PRESET course and Teacher Development:

How can teacher trainers and those in charge of teacher development get their trainees or teachers to be better questioners? It is important for trainees to become familiar with key verbs used in Bloom's taxonomy. This will allow their students to become more knowledgeable, more skilled, and develop a better understanding of what they are seeking to learn. If students are making progress, they are mastering ideas and information (Gershon, 2015). Trainees should write lesson plans with anticipated questions using the key terms while incorporating different level of questioning; this will allow trainees to plan, think creatively, and get practice in this skill area. Trainees, but particularly teachers, should video themselves with an analysis of questioning while identifying strengths and areas that need improvement. Teachers can record a segment of the lesson, script the questions asked, and analyse by calculating whether questions required one correct answer only or many correct answers. One researcher, Hamblen (1988, p.199) states, "Teachers need to spend time coding and analysing their own questions, student answers, and student questions" to become more effective questioners. Finally, teachers with all levels of experience need to keep the following questions in mind so they continue to reflect on how they use questions in the classroom:

- Am I utilizing enough variety of higher order and lower order thinking questions?
- Has my acceptance of correct answers become lazy?
- Do I allow students enough time to respond to my questions?
- Do I seek out dominant learners or brighter students to answer?
- Do my lessons involve only a minority of the class, with a majority of sleepy onlookers?
- How do I respond to incorrect answers?
- How can I challenge incorrect answers, but still encourage students to answer in class?
- Are my students self-conscious about giving wrong answers?
- Have I established trust in the classroom?

(Hunkins, 1995; Dantonio & Beisenherz, 2001; Gershon, 2013)

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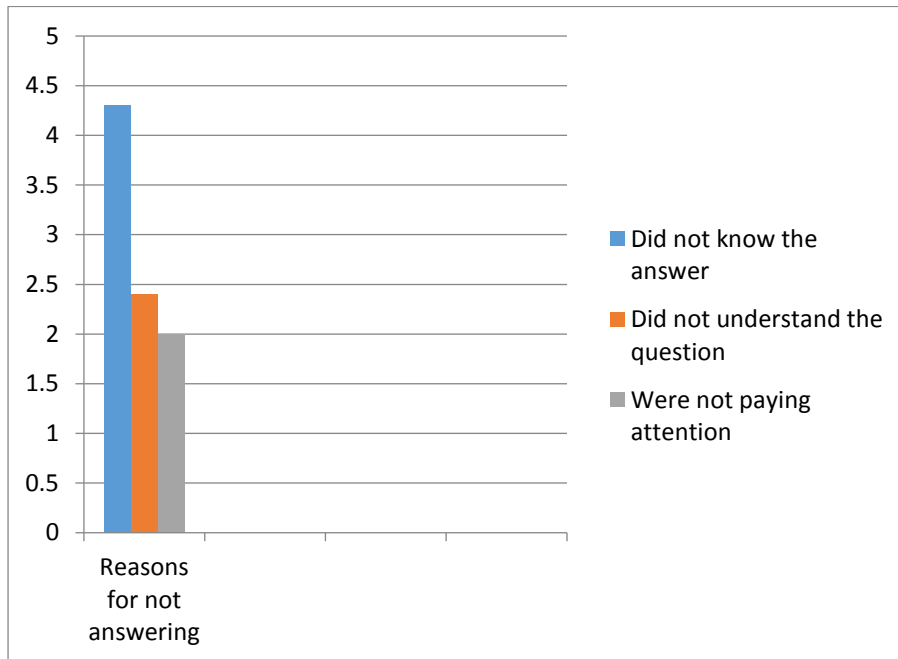
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Appendix 1



Appendix 2

Sample Completed Questionnaire

Sample 1

1. What kind of questions do you ask?

- Informal questions about students' lives, news etc...
- Instruction checking questions
- Concept checking questions
- Questions to elicit specific language – vocab, grammatical structure, functional chunks etc.
- Questions to encourage students to expand and develop answers during feedback

2. Outline some of the reasons you ask questions during your lessons:

- To build rapport with students and to show interest in them
- To check comprehension of task requirements
- To check students' comprehension new lexis, grammar etc.

3. How do you collect evidence that your students are ready to move on?

Ability to use language targeted through CCQs and via tasks.

4. When asking your students questions during a lesson, how long do you typically wait in order for them to respond?

Depends on;

- the difficulty of the question, but it's always hard to know how long is enough
- the student and their normal tendencies when asked questions e.g. if the student will try to “wait it out” until you stop questioning them

5. How do you deal with students' incorrect answers or non-responses?

For incorrect answers;

- Visual cues or backchanneling to suggest they don't have the correct answer.
- Opening the question to others

For non-responses it depends on the specific student's tendency to do this and the reasons I perceive for the non-response, therefore I either wait or encourage others to answer.

6. Are there any other issues that arise during the lesson when you ask questions that you would like to mention?

Because I ask a lot of questions I find that students expect that I will be the only person asking questions. It would be great if they asked each other more questions, more frequently, but I find it hard to get students to do this.

Sample 2

1. What kind of questions do you ask?

I predominantly ask concept checking questions in class to ensure understanding. I also ask questions to check instructions and to elicit answers to questions on texts.

2. Outline some of the reasons you ask questions during your lessons:

I ask concept checking questions to check understanding of a subject, whether it is vocabulary, a grammar point etc... I find it necessary as it would be impossible to confirm that your students completely understand something without concept checking. I check instructions to ensure that the students understand what I am asking them to do in class. I find that if you merely ask them to do something without checking instructions, there are always students who have not been paying attention or have not completely understood your instructions. Finally, I ask eliciting questions about a text to find out the answers to comprehension questions on a text as otherwise I find that you can't confirm that they have completed a task and fully grasped the answers.

3. How do you collect evidence that your students are ready to move on?

Concept checking questions are my usual way of ensuring that students are ready to move on. For example, if we are working on new vocabulary for a text and have done both controlled and free practice, I will do final concept checking by asking them a variety of questions and also have them give me example uses in a sentence to prove their understanding.

4. When asking your students questions during a lesson, how long do you typically wait in order for them to respond?

I'm unsure of the exact time to wait but I would say it is ten second at the maximum. I find that anything more than that doesn't generate a response and tends to stall the class a little. I try to prompt them if they are struggling and it gets to a natural point where they obviously can't answer.

5. How do you deal with students' incorrect answers or non-responses?

If a student answers something incorrectly I try to be encouraging and make sure that they don't feel bad for not getting the correct response. I will ask the class if anyone else has an idea or give the student a hint towards where they might find the answer. It depends on the student, as some don't mind not knowing the answer and are eager to find out and don't mind others helping. However, you can have students who don't respond well to advice from others on an answer and so with them I might point them in the direction of the answer or simply say something encouraging and move to the next student. It's a judgement call based on the students and your awareness of their responses in class. When there is no Responses I would typically try and draw their eye to the passage that the answer is in or, if it is a listening text, try and jog their memory on a certain topic that was mentioned. This tends to elicit a response from the more outgoing students.

6. Are there any other issues that arise during the lesson when you ask questions that you would like to mention?

There are times when checking instructions that some students feel as though you are talking down to them or treating them like children, even though it is necessary. This can be quite difficult as you need to ensure they know what they are doing but they don't appreciate you checking with them.

Sample 3

1. What kind of questions do you ask?

1. **Managerial questions**
2. **Concept checking questions**
3. **Probing questions**
4. **Lower order questions**
5. **Higher order questions**

2. Outline some of the reasons you ask questions during your lessons:

Managerial questions – to keep the classroom moving, to demonstrate care to learners, and to assist learners getting to know each other

Concept checking questions – after giving instructions, after direct teaching, after a learner gives a definition or an explanation

Probing questions – to seek further clarification from learners, to elicit examples to start a grammar presentation, to generate discussion or debate, to encourage shy learners to speak, to revert back to a main topic, directing one probing question to a learner to grab their attention

Lower order questions – generally use lower order questions in an accuracy based activity. Direct questions for the purpose of introducing topics or as icebreakers are helpful. Lower order questions are useful when recycling vocabulary, creating lists, ranking or sequencing topics.

Higher order questions – for more fluency based activities, debates and discussions, I use higher order questions. I feel this gives learners an opportunity to engage in critical thinking whilst using the language focus. In a grammar focused lesson I find that using higher order questions towards the end of the lesson acknowledges learners differentiated pace and invites learners to display their more general prior knowledge. Higher order questioning prompts learners to think in a more critical or abstract manner, judgement, reasoning, problem solving, evaluating and application of strategy are all encouraged through this method of questioning. All excellent aspects to engage particularly during group tasks and in fluency based activities.

3. How do you collect evidence that your students are ready to move on?

Facial expression: I rely heavily on facial expression and body language to judge when learners are ready to move from one element of the lesson. If a learner is expressing confusion, I will start an open class concept checking quick fire question session rather than singling out a learner. When the class is on task, I check if the topic is clear with them one on one.

Listening: after a grammar or language presentation, I tend to set accuracy based activities to be completed in small groups or pairs. Whilst learners are completing the activity, I listen without interruption to various pairs. As a class I revise topics if needed or move onto the next activity not.

Concept checking: through concept checking responses (gaining answers from a mix of the class)

Worksheets: learners demonstrate an understanding of a topic by completing worksheets, cloze tests, personalised sentences or cross words.

Progress test: I find this is the least effective method of assessment. There is a time pressure in the classroom; learners want the test score at the end of the class. Many learners do not want to actually analyse their performance. Often they will not ask questions regarding the test.

Writing: setting a writing exercise that appears to have little connection with a grammar focus is a great way of learning if students are ready to move on. As some learners do not make the connection of using the grammar notes whilst writing, therefore they are simply writing using their genuine understanding of a topic.

CES online: I do not use CES online tutorials to check if learners are ready to move on

Can do statements: It is very rare that I revert to these

4. When asking your students questions during a lesson, how long do you typically wait in order for them to respond?

I wait (a deafening) 30 seconds. If I do not receive an answer, then I ask a prompt question. Then I redirect the learners back to the original question – either rephrased or same question again. But I'm not sure what the optimal amount of time should be.

5. How do you deal with students' incorrect answers or non-responses?

I always thank a learner. I repeat their response back to them using inflection – turning the answer into a question, make eye contact, then look around the room inviting other learners to step in.

I will ask a learner why they chose the answer – perhaps refer back to the use or form of a grammar point.

If there is a choice of two answers, I will read the full sentence inserting the correct answer and ask the learner could that option work.

I never say, 'no that is wrong' or use negative language. I feel this discourages the learner and would have a negative impact self-esteem wise, and participation wise.

If I select a learner to provide an answer and they have no response, I ask if they would like to provide an answer to another question they are more confident with. Or I throw open to the class suggesting that they help their 'friend'.

6. Are there any other issues that arise during the lesson when you ask questions that you would like to mention?

Questions, from the class, that I do not know the answer too...

These are tough to deal with at times. Sometimes they are general knowledge questions and I simply say, I do not know. But English language questions; I find that if a learner asks me more than one question that I do not know the answer too there can be a bit of eye rolling or loss of confidence. If I am asked a question that I am unsure about, I tend to throw the question open to the class. More often than not a learner will answer or attempt to answer and this will trigger something for me.

The Use of Self-Assessment in School Placement Procedures

By Peter Lahiff

Course Director Trinity Cert TESOL at English Studio

Academic Director of Future Learning

Self-supervised

Peter is an experienced course designer, teacher trainer and academic manager who has worked in ELT for 15 years. He is course director on Ireland's only active Trinity Cert. TESOL at English Studio Dublin, and is Academic Director of Future Learning, where he develops and implements innovative technology enhanced summer language courses for young learners.

Online at: @Lahiffp

Aims & Context

It is the aim of this research to explore the use of self-assessment as part of the placement procedures of a language school and whether it could be used to guide class formation and learner objective setting at the outset of a course.

This study was conducted in the context of the summer language programme which Future Learning Language School runs in Donabate, Dublin and Canterbury in the United Kingdom. These programmes run from the end of June until the end of July and cater to younger learners from 10 to 17 years of age. These learners come from a range of European countries, with some from Russia and China. The majority are from Spain and Italy. They are recruited, in the main, through intermediaries, which means that the school does not have direct contact with them and it is not possible to assess their level in advance of their arrival. These agents mediate all queries and complaints from parents. Learners are often accompanied by Group Leaders who help to manage the learners and look after their welfare, and who indirectly represent the parents.

The role of this researcher within the organisation is Academic Director. This role involves setting educational policy across all centres as well as designing and implementing all the courses and recruiting and supporting the academic staff. He has been in this post since the company was founded and has been closely involved in establishing the approach of the school. He has been involved in

Academic management for over fifteen years and has had an interest in developing the use of self-assessment for at least ten years.

Future Learning takes a technology enhanced approach to language learning. This means using the technological tools which students are used to using in their daily lives wherever that can be useful for learning. The approach is also project based, with students working individually and in collaboration with others to develop and improve upon a digital product. Future Learning also places a strong emphasis on developing learner autonomy, which means involving students in the selection or creation of course material, the setting of their learning objectives and in monitoring their own progress (Holec, 1981).

This study was conducted by means of a look-back analysis on anonymised placement data gathering during the running of the summer programme in July 2016.

Rationale

The rationale for a move to self assessment at the placement stage is in order to make sure that the learner's first contact with the school is consistent with the approach which they will be following throughout their course. If learners are to achieve anything on short courses the maximum use must be made of the time and the tone should be set from the very start. On a programme that has learner autonomy as a core value and it is the opinion of this research that the placement procedure should be consistent with that for it to have a real impact. This study recognises that it is not enough for the academic manager to be happy with the procedure, in order to be able to say that an approach to placement testing works, it needs to work for all the parties that are interested in the outcome. This includes the learners themselves, the teachers, the academic management of the school and for group leaders, agents and parents. For learners, a placement assessment works if it points them towards a suitable class which offers an appropriate pace and level of challenge. It should not be too stressful and ideally should help them understand what areas they might develop so that they can set learning objective for themselves. For teachers the assessment should be easy to administer and, ideally, provide useful information about the learners' needs.

From the experience of this research, it is in the interest of the academic management that an assessment should be efficient to administer and analyse without requiring additional manpower. It should also provide clear and reliable indication of which class the student should be placed in. Parents, who are represented on the ground by the Group Leaders, have an interest in what level of English their son or daughter has, which is coloured by their placement in school or in other private courses. If they feel that this is inconsistent there will be pressure to change the class. Often this is gauged according to where their friends have been placed. When assessing the usefulness of a self-assessed placement procedure all these interests need to be taken into account.

Background to placement testing

Placement, regardless of the type of course, is conducted in most schools by means of a language knowledge MCQ (Multiple Choice Quiz). The results of an indirect test of this sort are usually checked by means of a brief interview with a teacher. In summer language programmes, where the intake on a particular day can be very large, there is often little time to give due consideration to the interview

to combining both pieces of information and a ranking of MCQ results is the main, or sometimes the sole, basis of class formation.

Where a course is focused on developing language knowledge, then it is entirely consistent to base placement on an MCQ such as the one described above. If, however, it is a course with the objective of developing communication skills then something like an oral interview is more appropriate. The challenges are in the logistics of organising the interviews and in standardising results between a variety of testers. This can be overcome with staff training and by replacing the one-to-one interview with a group communication activity which is monitored and assessed by the class teacher. Where the communication task is well-constructed, it can allow students to show the authentic communication skills with the limitation being that students whose confidence is low, or who are shy, do perform as well in group task.

Future Learning aims to bring its placement process into line with learner autonomy by replacing the MCQ with a self-assessment questionnaire which would assist learners in defining their level.

Potential pitfalls

Apart from its use in the European language portfolio, self-assessment is used most often in formative self-correction exercises and as part of progression testing. This researcher is not aware of it being used in placement procedures, especially and definitely not where younger learners are concerned. The following is an account of the issues that might compromise the assessment and the measures which can be taken in order to mitigate that.

- **Reliability & Learning Experience**

With any subjective measure of competence, the reliability of the assessment depends to a large degree on the experience of the assessor. In the case of oral assessments conducted by teachers, it requires regular standardisation to ensure that results are comparable between groups and not just normative within a particular group. It is also the case with self-assessment that the more experience the learner has in doing it, the more reliable their assessment will be. Placement testing occurs, by definition, before the learners have taken part in any training. Some learners may never have been asked to assess their own level before this and consider this the sole responsibility of the teacher. This is linked to the Dunning-Kruger (2003) effect, where less experienced learners will tend to over-estimate their ability, as they do not yet know the limits of their ability. There is also a possible corollary to this effect with very experienced learners, who are more aware of the full breadth and depth of the subject, will under-estimate their ability in comparison.

In order to get meaningful feedback some careful priming needs to be done before beginning the self-assessment. This involves anchoring their assessment to meaningful reference points.

- **Understanding (Linguistic & Meta-cognitive)**

In the case of younger learners, the ability to reflect on their own learning will depend on their cognitive development. The youngest of the students in question is ten years old and, according to

Noboru Kobayashi and Hirotaka Kataoka (2009), children as young as 6 can determine whether a task is easy or difficult and from 10 are able to allocate time and effort accordingly. There is a difference, they say, between a child having meta-cognitive knowledge and being able to use it in practice. They therefore recommend that from 7-8 years of age, that children are asked to consider which learning methods to use as this leads to improved performance in a range of areas. This points to both the feasibility and desirability of what we are trying to do here.

There is an additional level of understanding which may hamper the learners' ability to self-assess and that is their linguistic comprehension of what they are being asked. Summer language schools normally deal with mixed nationality groups through the medium of language being learned, with all assessments administered in that second language. The assessment might be compromised by the learners' difficulty in understanding the instructions and the self-assessment questions. When assessing a small number of relatively homogeneous students, then a cooperative group leader can help to set things up with an explanation in the learner's first language. With larger number of students, the greater the mix of nationalities and abilities starting on the same day, the more difficult this sort of support is to organise, especially as many groups leaders do not see it as part of their responsibilities.

There is also the option of translating the self-assessment instrument into the most common first languages. While three quarters of students tend to come from either Spain, Italy or France and could be catered for in this way, it would not be practical to have a version for the one or two Hungarians, Slovenians or other nationalities that come sporadically and in small numbers (Failte Ireland, 2011). The greater concern would be that this conflicts with the effort, which such school make, to establish the school as an English medium environment from the start, where students get all instruction through the medium of English.

In order to minimise linguistic difficulties, time needs to be taken to go through the questions, discuss their meaning and hear model answers from a teacher and from fellow students.

- Availability

When asking learners to assess their ability to successfully complete certain tasks through the medium of English, you are effectively asking them to remember the last time they did something of this sort and how easy or hard they found it. Their assessment will be coloured by how easy it is to remember such an experience, the availability of the memory (Khaneman 2011). In order to minimise the effect of this on the overall assessment students need to be lead through an exercise which helps to jog their memories, while being sensitive to the danger of overly influencing their answers.

- Culture & Gender

The issue of culture, where those nationalities of a more outgoing and expressive disposition may over-estimate their oral communication skills, while those with a tendency to be more quiet and shy may under-estimate them, also needs to be considered. To talk about learners in terms of types like this is, of course, a generalisation and the issue can be more one of personality than of nationality. It is important to monitor any assessment for potential bias of this sort.

The final area which has potential to skew the self-assessment is the issue of gender. It is sometimes reported that there is a tendency for female learners to underestimate their ability, while male learners will over-estimate (Lipsett, 2008). This too may be a gross generalisation, but the potential for it to be a factor that biases the assessment cannot be ignored.

Development of Self-Assessment Instrument

When it came to developing a self-assessment questionnaire we looked to self-assessment grid which was published as part of the common European Framework and which also forms part of the European language portfolio. The descriptors had to be adapted to make them accessible to young learners and lower levels. In each case it was described using a concrete example which they could connect to their practical experience. Descriptors are available for written and oral communication but for the purposes of this assessment the questions were limited to oral communication skills. The reason being that this was primarily the skill they wish to develop on summer short courses. To the six descriptors contained in the Common European Framework, we have added another, labelled A0 and looked to Grade 1 in the Trinity College London Graded Exams in Spoken English (GESE) to reference what the descriptor should be.

The prompts developed for the self-assessment instruments are as follows:

SPEAKING SKILLS

A0 = Give simple instructions [Stand up! Sit Down! Give me it!]

A1 = Introduce myself and talk about family or friends, and describe physically

A2 = Talk about home, work or school, where it is, what it is like, what I like to do there

B1 = Talk about an experience I have had, when, where and how it happened and how I felt about it

B2 = Talk about my plans or ambitions, give their advantages & disadvantages and explain why I want to do it

C1 = Explain difference in styles of clothes, music, books, compare things and describe subtle differences

C2 = Make an argument about a complex issue, mentioning different opinions and give a response to them, e.g. global warming, smoking, school uniforms ...

LISTENING SKILLS

A0 = Understand simple words. (Yes, No, Hello, Ok)

A1 = Understand instructions when they speak slowly

A2 = Understand a simple message or announcement at a train station, shop, airport or on a voicemail

B1 = Understand the general idea of a song or simple dialogue

B2 = Understand TV news headlines or an advertisement without subtitles

C1 = Understand almost all the dialogue of TV series or film without subtitles

C2 = Follow a conversation with three or four speakers of the language and understand their different ideas

This instrument was pilot tested with a small group of adult learners whose levels had been assessed by a teacher and on an MCQ in order to be able to cross-reference the results. These results correlated closely enough to give confidence in the reliability of the instrument.

In pilot testing it emerged that a simple binary of, “yes I can” or “no I can't” was not useful. Students who felt they could do it to some degree struggled to decide whether they could do it or not. Some gave themselves the benefit of the doubt, who should not have, while others tended to say no unless they were very confident in their ability. In order to get around this problem, the learners were asked to rate each “can do” statement on a six-point Likert scale from 0 to 5, where 0 means “I can't”, 1 means it is “Very Difficult” going up to 5, which mean they found it “Very Easy”. In addition to being more subtle, converting it into a numerical score made it possible to calculate results more efficiently. In the process of piloting testing it the following grade point scale was drawn up and was used in this study

Grade Point	Teacher	Self	MCQ
1	C2	35	42
2	C1+	34	41
3	C1	31-33	38-40
4	C1-	30	37
5	B2+	29	35-36
6	B2	26-28	33-34
7	B2-	25	31-32
8	B1+	24	29-30
9	B1	21-23	26-28
10	B1-	20	24-25
11	A2+ (Fair, Good, Excel)	17-19	23
12	A2	16	20-22
13	A2-	15	19
14	A1+	14	17-18

15	A1	11-13	15-16
16	A1-	10	13-14
18	A0	0-9	0-12

Sample for this study

This was conducted on a sample of 69 learners from a range of ages, levels and educational backgrounds from Spain, Italy, France and Russia. About two thirds were between 10 and 14 years of age with the remaining ones being 15 to 17 years of age. These students attended the Future Learning summer school in Summer 2016 and in addition to their levels being assessed by the teacher they undertook a self-assessment using the instrument described above and the two results were compared. Placement classes were selected at random to participate in this study according to the procedure described below.

Procedure

Students were sorted by age into groups of 15 and the teacher conducted an oral assessment of them while they engaged in a group conversation task. This involved students in groups of four each being assigned a question to ask the others and report on, while the teacher monitored and assessed their ability. As part of their induction, each group of teachers was given a standardisation task to watch and discussed their assessment with colleagues in order to ensure consistency.

After the teacher's assessment had been reported to the management and the classes were being formed, the same groups were taken through the self-assessment procedure. This involved a preparatory stage, where students as a class group were taken through the prompts by the teacher and, in each case, were asked to think of a time that they did this, or give an example, and to tell a partner or the group something about where, when, or what it was and who they were with. Their purpose of this is to clarify their understanding, to provide a model and to prime their memory in order to avoid the availability problem flagged above.

After this preparatory stage each learner does the questionnaire individually and their score collated to give the overall level which is compared with the teacher's assessment in the next section.

Findings

The table below compares the learners' self-assessment with the teacher's assessment according to the grade point scale that was devised to grade the self-assessment instrument. The first row gives the number who had an identical result or who differed only by a plus or minus. The second row gives those who were within the same band, basic (A), independent (B) or proficient (C) users of the language, but the self-assessment was one level up. The third row gives those who self-assessed at one level above what the teacher gave them and into a different band, the following rows show those who self-assessed at two levels and three levels above respectively. The final two show those who self-assessed at one and levels below what the teacher gave them. In order to gauge the ability of those with different levels of learning experience the numbers in each row are divided into their

bands show how many basic (A), independent (B), or proficient (C) language users were able to accurately self-assess. The numbers are also analysed according to gender, age and nationality.

	Nos	A Band	B Band	C Band	Male	Female	10 to 14	15 to 17	Spanish	Italian	Other*
Same & Same +/-	15	1 & 1 = 2	8 & 2 = 10	3 & 0 = 3	4	11	9	6	8	5	2
Same Band 1Up	11	0	11 (B1)	0	4	7	5	6	5	4	2
1 Up	12	0	5	7	4	8	8	4	4	4	4
2 Up	20	13 (A2)	5 (B1)	0	7	13	16	4	7	12	1
3 Up	6	6 (A2)	0	0	1	5	4	2	1	3	2
1 Down	4	0	2	2	3	1	0	4	2	2	0
2 Down	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
TOTAL	69	21	33	14	23	46	42	27	27	31	11

*Russian (6) & French (5)

From these results we can see that less than a quarter of students were able to accurately self-assess and when those within the same band are added it is still less than half. Interestingly, however, no bias was shown against female learners, according to age and therefore cognitive development or associated with nationality. Female learners did as well as their male counter-parts in accurate self-assessment when the proportion of them in the sample is taken into consideration. Male learners were not seen to disproportionately over-estimate their ability, nor were there more females under-estimating theirs. The fact that age does not seem to be a significant determiner of which students will be able to accurately self-asses is a very interesting finding. Common sense would suggest that a degree of maturity is required in order to be able to do this well, but over 10 years of age this was not shown to be a factor. On the issue of nationality, there was a tendency detected among Italians to over-estimate their level when compared with the Spanish and other students.

The most significant factor determining the ability to self-assess is their current level. Those assessed by teachers as A2 were most likely to over-estimate their ability, as would be predicted by the Dunning-Kruger effect. The corollary also appears to be true with those who under-estimate their level being more likely to be in the C band, as proficient users of the language.

Conclusions

When considering the interests that this procedure could serve; while it was easy to administer and analyse, the task of self-assessment was challenging for lower level learners regardless of their age. Taking this as the sole basis for class formation would not, therefore, serve the interest of these learners, their parents or the management of the course in placing them with classes of an appropriate level. The question then is whether self-assessment at the start of courses is something that should be valued in a programme that seeks to foster learner autonomy. Hattie's 2003 meta-analysis of the

different type of interventions which have the greatest effect on learners showed that far and away the most significant was asking students to self-report their grades. Its power lies in engaging learners with what they are doing and why. Giving them a sense of purpose and developing their ability to direct their own learning. This is why it is important to ask learners how they think they are doing, but it takes training from them to be able to answer accurately, asking learners to justify their determination and following up at intervals to ask them to assess how they are doing. As part of an approach which includes the self-assessment of progress and achievement this can be a very useful exercise and is worth investing in.

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Adapting Approaches to Pronunciation

By

Colette Godkin and Vincent Smyth

ATC Language Schools, Dublin

Supervised by:

Joanne Mitten

Academic Manager, ATC Language Schools, Dublin

Context and Aims:

The aim of the following Action Research Projects is to investigate how teachers can adapt their approaches to pronunciation to individual learner needs, focusing on specific nationalities and the particular difficulties they experience. The intended outcome was to highlight to teachers the benefits of exploring varied and learner centred ways of teaching pronunciation and promoting awareness of pronunciation in the classroom.

The in-class research was conducted over the course of 5 weeks, from 5th to 30th September 2016 in ATC Language School's year-round adult school by three permanent teachers. The students in the classes involved in the research ranged in age from 17 to 35. The student nationalities included: Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian, German, Arabic, Korean and Russian.

ATC Language School Dublin receives students on a rolling enrolment basis. New students are tested using either an online or paper-based placement test which has a focus on vocabulary and grammatical structures. On their first morning, students' spoken interaction skills are assessed through use of a first day needs analysis questionnaire which doubles as a speaking test. This allows students to inform the school of areas they would like to improve and areas in which they feel confident. Taking the first day speaking assessment forms from January 2016 to August 2016, the research supervisor found that 83% of students stated that their main priority during their studies was to improve speaking skills. 68% of students orally assessed on their first day specifically mentioned a need to improve their pronunciation skills during their time in the school.

Rationale:

ATC Language Schools' teachers are instructed to follow the Communicative Approach in lessons, aiming to make communicative competence the goal of teaching and learning. However, they are free to experiment with and implement various methodologies in order to achieve this. At the level of language theory, the Communicative Approach views language broadly in the following way:

- Language is a system for the expression of meaning

- The primary function of language is to allow interaction and communication
- The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses

At the level of learning theory, the Communicative Approach is based around the following principles:

- Activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning
- Language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process
- Learning activities should be selected according to how well they engage the learner in meaningful and authentic language use.

As stated in ATC Language Schools' Documented Curriculum Framework, these basic principles of learning within the Communicative Approach are followed in conjunction with an information processing model of learning, which sees second language acquisition as the building up of knowledge systems that can eventually be called upon automatically for speaking and understanding. In the build-up of these systems, learners need to pay attention to any aspect of the language that they are trying to produce or understand. It follows that if they are to acquire language through participating in meaningful communicative tasks, learners need to be given the opportunity to attend to or notice critical features of the language they use and hear (J.C. Richards et al). For this reason, we encourage teachers to ensure that there is always a focus on relevant language use, in carrying out communicative tasks in the classroom. It is expected that teachers focus on pronunciation systematically throughout lessons, and that they take individual learner needs into account when approaching pronunciation practice and correction of pronunciation errors. Up until the introduction of the Action Research Projects (to be referred to as ARPs from this point on) detailed in this report, the academic team had not held detailed discussions, sharing sessions or TD meetings regarding specific techniques that might address persistent pronunciation errors in specific nationalities and why they may occur. This led to the ARPs' focus on Individual Learner Needs: Pronunciation.

The research supervisor in this case is the Director of Studies, who is responsible for ensuring that:

- the syllabus is followed within reason;
- the communicative approach is followed within reason;
- lesson delivery is to a high standard using a range of materials and methods;
- teacher development and support is maintained;
- the overall academic ethos of the school is consistently upheld.

Academic management (Academic Director, Director of Studies and Assistant Director of Studies) carries out various scheduled and buzz observations throughout the year. Over a 12 months' period, a permanent teacher can expect to be observed at least three times. Teachers are sent the Director of Studies Observation Form and the key focus points of the observations a week in advance, as a way of setting out success criteria. Since 2015, the school has been placing a focus on approaches to pronunciation through teacher development sessions, teacher sharing sessions and peer observations. Following on from this, Pronunciation has almost always been one of the focuses during

academic management observations. During observations that took place from 2015 to 2016 it was noted that in some lessons pronunciation was being approached in the following ways:

1. An ad hoc or sporadic approach – when pronunciation errors arose, they were corrected by the teacher, and sometimes problematic sounds were drilled. Sometimes teachers referred to the IPA and individual sounds. Drilling was sometimes observed.
2. An insular approach – in some lessons pronunciation awareness was being “held back” to be focused on at a certain point in the lesson, and being taught as almost a separate entity to the rest of the lesson. It’s likely that course books have cultivated this practice as some* have pronunciation sections that occur at one point in the module, but are not systematically focused on throughout the module.

In order to ensure that pronunciation was systematically and consistently focused on the Director of Studies chose Individual Learner Needs: Pronunciation as the focus of the Action Research Projects. The intended outcome was that teachers would build a bank of tasks and pronunciation approaches that would suit various nationalities and that this bank would be available to all teachers as a reference document. Another intended result of the project was that teachers who took part in the ARPs would grow in confidence when dealing with pronunciation in class. They would also present their findings to their colleagues in order to assist all teachers in integrating consistent and focused pronunciation practice and pronunciation error correction in lessons.

Procedure:

Teachers gathered together on 2nd September to discuss the ARP and its intended outcomes. They were presented with the following information:

Individual Learner Needs: Pronunciation

Objective: To gather research on the various pronunciation issues of different nationalities and to compile teaching techniques in order to overcome persistent pronunciation errors.

Aim: By the end of the research project, teachers will have more confidence in targeting individual student needs regarding pronunciation. The school will have a reference booklet containing varied pronunciation teaching techniques. The teachers will have presented their findings to their colleagues with the aim of encouraging systematic and focused pronunciation work in lessons.

Teachers willing to take part in the APRs will be assigned a student nationality along with notes from Learner English Swan and Smith. The teaching pair will be instructed to research techniques that will help alleviate persistent pronunciation problems their assigned nationality tends to display. They will then put these techniques into practice in the classroom and report their findings back to the academic team. Notes from each teacher’s research will be written up and combined for use by all teachers as a reference handbook.

Example:

Italian: /l/ is frequently realised or perceived as /i:/ causing Italian students to pronounce live as leave. A solution to this is to draw the students’ attention to the differing shapes of their mouths and their

jaw movements when pronouncing the two different sounds. Students should use a mirror to watch how their facial muscles change with each sound.

Some teachers expressed concern regarding upcoming annual leave and/ or time constraints, and as it was the first time the school had officially attempted ARPs it was agreed that this would be an optional pilot project, rather than a whole school undertaking. This resulted in three permanent teachers carrying out the research outlined above. The researcher has included two studies in this report to avoid repetition.

Findings

The findings below are as the teachers presented them on 30th September 2016. The ARP supervisor has made no changes or amendments to the work produced.

Vincent Smyth

B1-B2

12-14 students

Vincent focused on Spanish speakers for the duration of his Action Research Project. He drew from his experience with Spanish L1 learners and also used Swan Learner English as reference.

He found that his Spanish learners struggled with the following sounds:

Sound	Example	Pronunciation Error	Rationale
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/ei/	Radius	/reidiəs/	Confusing /ei/ and /æ/ sounds.
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Raahdius	/rædiəs/	A	in Spanish is always pronounced like /ah/. In English it can be /æ/ or /ei/.
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/dʒ/	General	/'dʒenrəl/	
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Pronouncing /dʒ/ as /h/ with a slight “rasp”.

Heneral	/henrəl/		
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In Spanish, when “g” comes before “e” or “i”, it sounds like the “h” in the word “hot” except it has a “raspier” quality.

/h/ Hospital /hɒspɪtl/ Not pronouncing the /h/ at the beginning of words.

Ospital /ɒspɪtl/ |H| in Spanish is always silent, whereas in English it can be silent or pronounced as /h/.

/l/ Sit /sɪt/ Elongating the /l/ sound to the point where it becomes /i: /

Pronouncing sit like seat /si:t/ In Spanish |l| is always pronounced like /ee/

Or a slightly shortened /i: /.

Vincent found that integrating some “coping strategies” into his lessons helped his students improve their overall pronunciation skills. Pronunciation practice in a positive and encouraging environment, in which learners are given the opportunity to repeat sounds and words and receive feedback is essential to aid progress. Vincent’s learners found both visual and aural reinforcement of the sounds in English helpful when working on pronunciation. He also found that when he allowed students to critique their own efforts they grew in confidence and began to hear the difference in their own pronunciation over time.

He tried out the following tasks and found that they helped students become aware of their pronunciation errors while practising other aspects of language. Vincent felt that the tasks helped to integrate recycling of vocabulary, practice of new vocabulary and pronunciation awareness, without making the students feel they were “under the spotlight,” thus relieving some of the pressure they previously felt during spoken production and interaction.

Task 1

Using authentic video clips that contain pronunciation errors within them, then getting the students to identify the error and decide how the word or phrase should be pronounced. They’re encouraged to use their devices, online dictionaries and phonemic chart apps when working in pairs on this.

They are then encouraged to narrow down the specific sound that the speaker is having trouble with and identify it on the phonemic chart. Vincent found that this took away some of the apprehension students have when using the IPA.

Task 2

Stop the bus:

Students work in teams for this task. The teacher chooses 4 categories which include the target language of the week and target sounds the teacher feels students need to focus on. They then give the students a letter and students must think of 4 words in for each category using the letter the teacher has assigned which allows the teacher to focus in on particular sounds each time. The students only get a point when they pronounce all four words correctly. By correctly, the teacher is looking for these key aspects:

- Is the word comprehensible/ can the student be understood without strain on the listener’s part?

- Are the vowel sounds being applied correctly?
- Are the consonant sounds being applied correctly?
- Is stress accurate?

In both these tasks, the teacher chooses the category, or the target sounds, in order to have control over the language produced. This in turn allows the teacher to focus on different nationalities in each lesson, depending on the sounds the teacher decides need attention.

Colette Godkin

C1

12-14 students

Colette decided to focus on her students' overall attitude to pronunciation rather than on a particular nationality. Through openly discussing pronunciation issues with her students, she found that the issue lay in their association with accent and identity. One student in particular, with an extremely strong Spanish accent, was perfectly capable of mimicking RP. However he would only do it as a joke, and sated that felt highly uncomfortable when pronouncing English words in "the standard way". He was therefore reluctant to "give up" his Spanish pronunciation of English.

When this came to light, Colette realised that most of her students were facing this psychological block when it came to pronunciation. They told her that pronouncing English "correctly" made them feel:

- Uncomfortable
- Like they were taking on a persona
- Like they were being fake or not genuine
- Like they were not being themselves

So Colette decided to explore ways in which students could learn to feel comfortable with taking on the "identity" that comes with working on pronunciation. She wanted students to recognise that our body language and even our demeanour can change when we speak various languages, not just English.

Task 1

The Speech Accent Archive

<http://accent.gmu.edu/>

Colette began integrating this resource into her lessons. She would conduct a quiz with students in which they listen to a text being read by various nationalities around the globe, then guess the nationality of the speaker. This was to get students to think about what they sounded like compared to examples from their own and other countries. Students then got into the habit of searching for their own nationalities, analysing the difference between American, British and Irish accents and even copying certain aspects of the sounds they discovered. Colette's aim was to get the students to be

more relaxed when it came to letting go of what they saw as their “identity” or inhibitions, and trying out accents for fun.

This progressed to students actually recording themselves reading the passage from the website and analysing their own pronunciation as well as receiving teacher feedback. They could then listen to a native speaker (or any accent they found appealing) and try again.

Colette found that this activity, when recycled, helped the students let go of the fear of sounding silly or sounding fake when practising clear and accurate pronunciation.

Task 2:

This is a short task, but it gets the students thinking about how clear they really sound and how their pronunciation might have an impact on real life situation. Colette instructed her students to change their phone settings to English and see if Siri could understand them. Again, students found this entertaining, fun and enlightening. It encouraged more learner autonomy and helped students reflect on how clear they think they are and how clear they actually are.

Extra resource

21 Accents by Amy Walker (YouTube)

This YouTube clip shows the actor go through 21 different accents, just by stating her name and where she’s from each time. The students’ task was to look at the actor’s body language and facial expressions for each accent and analyse the difference between them and how they changed. At the end of the task the students were instructed to decide which one was her real accent and give reasons for their answer.

Teacher Conclusions

The teachers involved in the action research projects above found that through focusing on both their learners’ particular difficulties with, and attitudes to pronunciation, they were able to target specific learner needs.

Vincent Smyth found that the research allowed him to tailor production based activities such to the needs of the learners. It allowed him to explore how the activities can be adapted to all learners and varied nationalities, rather than just Spanish speakers.

Colette Godkin discovered what was holding certain students back when it came to pronunciation practice, both in and out of lessons. In order to make pronunciation practice feel more natural, she brought their attention to the pronunciation of English speakers around the world and allowed them to understand how pronunciation can differ, yet still be correct. This begs the question, is it right to focus on individual learner issues, or does this reinforce prejudices and create further fear of pronunciation in students? (Clement Laroy, 6-7)

Research Supervisor Conclusions

The research carried out in lessons, in some cases, took a different direction to the research supervisor’s expectations. It was assumed that the researchers would focus on the more technical

aspects of pronunciation, including alveolar continuants, alveolar stops and retroflex sounds that specific learners might struggle with.

In order to help their students focus on particular pronunciation difficulties, teachers took a more general, communicative approach to the tasks they designed. On reflection, this is not a surprise due to the strong focus the school places on communicative tasks and student centred learning.

The ARPs were successful in the fact that they assisted the teachers in understanding their student's difficulties and attitudes, and teachers have stated that they can see patterns and repetition from nationality to nationality, which helps each time new students are placed in their classes.

When setting up running ARPs in the future, the research supervisor with set out more specific outcomes, perhaps setting targeted outcomes for each researcher. This may result in a broader scale of findings and a larger bank of tasks and techniques to focus on.

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A. The Benefits of Using Extended Tasks

By Ian Brangan

Academic Development Manager at Alpha College of English

Self-supervised

Ian Brangan has been a teacher, teacher trainer and Academic Consultant for over twenty years. At present, he is the Academic Development Manager at Alpha College of English. He has presented at IATEFL, EAQUALS, QQI and MEI conferences as well as at schools & institutions across Europe on topics such as, teaching pronunciation, PBL, assessment, the CEFR, teaching vocabulary and filming your own teaching. his current area of interest is teaching through projects.

That Sinking Feeling

Most of us are familiar with the feeling when the learners seem not to be pulling their weight in class. You thought you were well prepared and the material itself is strong but it is not igniting their interest. At times this can be due to what Scott Thornbury refers to as teaching Grammar McNuggets (over focus on grammar structure and controlled practice) but, just as commonly, you are erroneously taking all the responsibility for the learning.

If we step back and reflect for a minute, it would seem obvious that content generated by the whole class will be infinitely more interesting to them than content generated by little old you. They have more of a stake in content they have generated.

Teaching's Magic Dust

Most of us are also familiar with that feeling when a topic really ignites the interest of the class. It's teaching's 'magic dust'. Your magic wand, in this case, is using extended tasks and projects.

Stop! I can hear you say. My classes are in an open enrolment system where I may only have students for a week or two. My classes are short and we don't have the resources for extended tasks

etc. Well, let me assure you, it is not the panacea for all teaching related challenges but it will drastically increase student responsibility for learning and hence their motivation.

My Context

I work in an open enrolment system where learners typically take 20 hours of classes per week, 10 of those with me. For this example, I am going to take my B2 level class. Each week we undertake an extended task/project together. We dedicate a good proportion of those 10 hours to the task (which is built into the curriculum in my college) and they have plenty to do at home too. The proof that it works, for me, is that I rarely have learners who do not take up the challenge.

The Task Stimulus

It's important to start with a good stimulus and a driving question. In this case, the big question was ***How can we compile/curate and comment on a developing news story using social media?*** Initially, I introduced the concept of using the website www.storify.com to curate a story by getting the learners to watch a simple 'How to' YouTube video <https://youtu.be/luZcU2E5cgl> to aggregate a story using social media. This type of video works well in class because it's visual and it reflects the type of viewing the learners do themselves at home. Once learners had the idea I asked them to go online and start to choose media news stories which they strongly identified with or found interesting. We spent some time looking at www.bbclearningenglish.co.uk

as the news section has excellent learner friendly content on current news stories. We discussed the news stories including the language of titles, headlines, taglines etc. Using a template, they analysed the language used in their stories. Was it personal? Was it immediate? Was its storyline objective and well researched or more populist and less serious?

The Students Role

It was now over to the students to start researching stories that interested them online. Having previously looked at example stories together we managed to get learners to choose relatively short, interesting content that they were able to understand themselves. To use storify the content must be in the public domain as on storify.com you can only find publically shared material. The content can come from search engines like google, could be a series of tweets or a publically shared facebook post or a GIF, a YouTube Video or a picture from Flickr or Instagram or an image from Getty images or another source which you can add. Storify has a browse feature and I found showing learners real examples of compiled stories was the quickest way to get their creative juices flowing. For homework, learners continue to select social media content on the stories they have chosen and post comments on the articles.

In class, we reviewed and edited the previous night's writing using the editing features in Storify. Learners then introduce their material to each other in two groups using the IWB (if you don't have one in class and/or by showing each other on their phones or tablets). Learners are encouraged (using simple templates) to listen and ask questions about the material and their comments.

The Teacher's Role:

We stop regularly to review how they are using the language and I give them a language upgrade daily.

The Collaborative Approach: One of the key aspects of this collaborative approach is the learners have more choice. They decide how they are going to work and what content to work with. In this case, they formed two groups and compiled two developing news stories.

Using 21st Century Skills:

In this project, one of the aims is that the students are learning about using search engines well and distinguishing between serious, well-researched content and less serious 'gossipy' new stories. In this example, I particularly like that the students are presenting their work online as they often present orally to their peers. Here they must have the courage to publish their 'edited' work at the end of the week. Storify makes it easy to broadcast to the sources you have used in your story or to other interested parties because you can notify them about the publication of your story.

I encouraged students to comment on other student's work.

Reflection:

Perhaps the most beneficial part of using extended tasks is the opportunity for reflection. For instance, as a class, we discussed the challenges they had faced finding suitable sources. We also discussed what they 'liked' about the task and what we could improve for next time. Inevitably there were some problems getting used to Storify but most of the students found it a valuable tool for learning English.

www.storify.com

Storify is an interesting and versatile website as long as you remember that the point is to bring together publicly shared information from the web. It's a new form of storytelling suited to learners who are digitally literate. It involves lots of brainstorming, discussion, editing, and presentation. It allows for diversity and sharing in the classroom. The last time I attempted this task with my students they compiled stories about animal rights issues, the challenges of single parenting and the US elections, among others.

Effective Teaching

As a final thought, I have found that shift the emphasis to the students supplying the material to be focussed on in class has meant they have put in a lot more preparation for the class and thus have a

greater stake in its outcome. I also find I learn a lot more from them that I used to, when I supplied all the content.

B. Rolling Projects into an Open Enrollment

By Laura Breen

Self-Supervised

Laura Breen became part of the ELT industry immediately after completing a Postgraduate Diploma in TESOL in 2014. She also holds an MA in TESOL from Ulster University. Along with teaching in Alpha College of English, she works as a materials writer, producing content for junior schools. Her interests include Project-Based Learning, Error Correction and Reflective Practice.

After being privy to a few enthusiastic conversations about the surge in interest in Project-Based Learning (PBL) in the English Language classroom, my ears pricked at its mention in the teacher room at Alpha College. I fancied the sound of a goal-orientated approach and the extent to which content is learner generated. What is more, the processes involved in conducting research, collaborating and creating a publicly presented product seemed so relevant, not only to modern day students, but also to *my* students.

All geared up to take a back seat and enjoy the ride, a taxing thought crossed my mind. Just how successfully can Project-Based Learning be implemented in a school where the system is open enrollment? That's my context you see. Fresh new faces every Monday and with each class having only 10 contact hours with their teacher, a lot is down to them. After some contemplation I decided to give it a shot and I haven't looked back since!

The Proof is in the Pudding: Publicly Presented Product

As the saying goes, "the proof is in the pudding", well in this case it's in the product. By having students present and display their project work beyond the walls of the classroom, I found there to be a noticeable hike in motivation. When students know that their work will be authentically consumed, by an audience who are interested in the product rather than the language, the bar is well and truly raised. This motivation fed into better quality content and learners were very keen to know that their finished products were up to scratch for the wider audience. By focusing on the quality of the end product, learners needed to address and fulfill present day standards in all contexts. It was reassuring to know that I, the teacher, am not the only assessor and there's an audience much wider than me.

Keep it Real: Authenticity

Real problems need real answers. What attracted me most to this style of learning is the authenticity of the processes involved. As projects feature real-world contexts students have to engage in their live environment to source information and answers. Learners are especially driven to answer questions and solve problems when it impacts on their concerns, issues and lives. Of course, learners come from all corners of the world but sharing a classroom and staying in Dublin results in a shared context.

Sharpen Up: 21st Century Skills

The EL classroom doesn't exist in a vacuum. And so, bearing this in mind we should remind ourselves practices such as researching, using technology, analyzing, presenting etc. are exercised day-to-day and so should be in the classroom too. University students were able to brush up their skills while pre-service learners became familiarized with these norms. On the whole, the learning processes felt meaningful for the students. It goes without saying that PBL assists learners in acquiring learner competencies required for success in college, career and life in the 21st century. Guess what? Learners recognize this!

Dig Deep: Challenging Problem/Question and Sustained Inquiry

One of the main tenets of PBL is to employ deep enquiry in order to answer the driving question. This means questions/problems must be challenging enough that learners can't simply look up answers on the internet. Research needs to be conducted and a variety of sources should be analyzed. I have to admit, teaching in a school with an open enrollment doesn't make this part easy. I had to ask myself - how deeply can students explore a question in a bare week? Surely a week is too short to conduct a sustained inquiry. To be frank, it's not ideal but it certainly is doable. It relies on strict adherence to planning from the teacher's side and major collaboration and self-management on the students' part. Within the group, roles must be clearly allocated from the word go and students have to act efficiently with their time and resources.

Indeed, this limitation does rule out some driving questions but with careful consideration and by outlining expectations and criteria to learners from the very beginning, the process will be smoother for all involved.

Mirror Mirror: Reflection and Editing

Public products require feedback and revision, drafting and editing. Google docs proved to be a really useful tool for facilitating comments and suggestions made by myself and learners on any writing done. While self and peer evaluation greatly enhanced the quality of work produced, reflection helped students to think about the effectiveness of their inquiry, the skills and knowledge they were gaining and how they were gaining it. I found that by inviting my students to reflect on how they had learnt, better enabled for their next project. By doing this, learners became more aware of their own learning styles and how they coped with language and content. As part of reflection for each project I probed them about how the project could be enhanced and what I could do to improve it. This, in turn, aided

my own reflection and gave me a clear idea about what worked so led to an improved project for future use.

Yeah I hear ye!: Student Voice and Choice

It is safe to say that being able to make choices and having your opinion heard (voice) is motivating for learners. It would even seem that a 21st century must is to make students more active and engaged. As a teacher who aims to complete projects within set time constraints, I'll be first to admit that at times voice and choice should be limited. To be more specific, providing learners with extensive choice at many stages can be paralyzing, not to mention time-consuming. While giving students freedom in how they manage and produce their projects can be a generous feeder for motivation, some decisions need to be made at the top. The balance can be found by facilitating students' input with some structure and scaffolding.

As an ESL teacher, what strikes me most about adopting this approach compared to others, is that I walk into a redefined classroom. By allowing the material primarily come from our learners and by sharing their work with the world at large, their learning experience, which was once thought to be solitary, transforms into a collaborative journey on which we embark alongside them.

Final Appendix:

Initial Rationale Documents for pilot research project

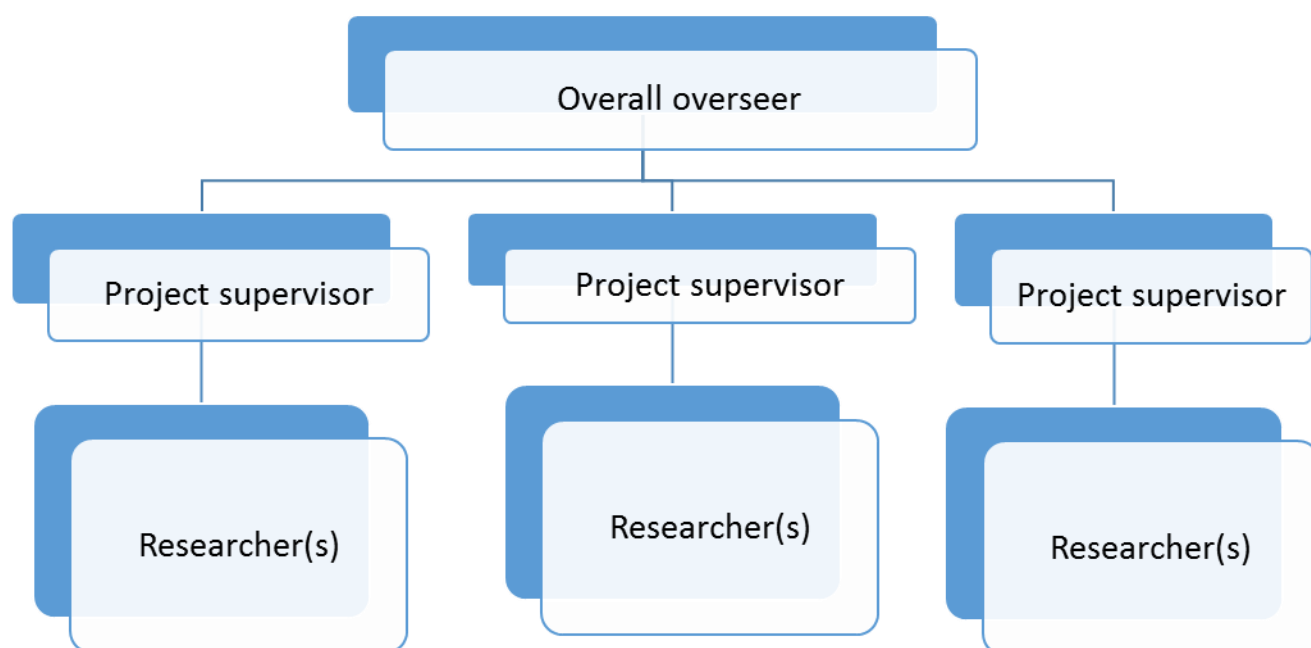
Why?

Based on the successes of the English Australia Action Research Programme (<https://www.englishaustralia.com.au/action-research-program>) and the English UK scheme (<http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/research-notes/>), it is felt that there is a growing need for a similar scheme to be piloted in Ireland to attempt to highlight and promote quality standards in the industry here.

It is also to promote the notion of academic research and enquiry as part of ‘what we do’ as teachers in Ireland.

How?

The format of the research projects in both Australia and the UK was quite simple.



- The Overall Overseer would be an external academic (performing a similar function that Simon Borg fulfilled in the UK) who would only become involved in the project at the very end.
- The Project supervisors would be individual members of Academic Management in an institution where the research was being undertaken. They would meet regularly with the researcher to provide feedback and direction where necessary. They would also stay in contact with the other project supervisors in order to share progress, advice, etc.
- The researchers would be individuals or groups in Language Teaching Organisations in Ireland who would undertake the actual projects at hand.

What?

This project is intended as a pilot scheme and, as a result, will be quite informally managed and maintained, with no particular level of expertise required or expected.

This project will aim to have completed pieces of research ready for presentation at the ELT Ireland Conference in February 2017 as well as accompanying bodies of work for publication in the ELT Ireland Bulletin.

The primary topics of the research project are as follows:

- Effective Classroom Management
- Planning and Materials
- Content Knowledge
- Testing and Assessment

It is suggested that the research parameters are within these areas.

When?

Normally, a project like this would take the full 12 months between annual conferences but we are attempting to pilot this in a shorter period.

As a result, the following timeframe is suggested:

- Friday July 8th: Researchers or Research Groups relatively finalised and some general topic ideas suggested. These can later be finalised with the project supervisor.
- July to September 30th: Classroom Experimentation and research, with the bulk of the research done. ELT Ireland deadline for proposals is Sept 30th so should be a general idea ready by then.
- October-November: Finalising project, writing it up, and submitting speaker's proposals to ELT Ireland.
- December-January: Project passed to Overall Overseer to review and judge, and provide feedback on the processes and content.
- February: Presentation and publication.

Pilot ELT Action Research Scheme

This research project is intended to form the basis of a presentation given at the 3rd Annual ELT Ireland Conference in February 2017. As such there must be a tangible project ready by the final submission date for this conference in September 2016. The structure for the action research project should

follow the typical structure of: reflection (and creation of research topic); planning and research, action, observation (these three stages can be repeated); and final reflection (where initial reflection is revisited and results of project compiled).

1. Researcher(s):

2. Supervisor(s):

3. Aim of research topic:

4. Brief overview of intended research and data-collection methods:

5. Brief outline of intended project timetable and key deliverables:

Notes from Supervisors meeting, Oct 7th

Revisiting timeline and expectations

1. Speaker proposals to be submitted by October 14th.
2. Short 'informal' 1000-word article to be written for the bulletin by the end of October (If possible). This will be sent directly to Laura O'Grady (ELT Ireland Committee Member).
3. Final report document of 2000 words with at least 5 sources in the bibliography to be completed by the 25th of November.
4. The structure of this final report will be as follows: Content (about 200 words), Rationale (about 600-800 words), Procedure (about 400-600 words), and Conclusions (about 600 words).
5. These will go through two readers who will provide feedback on the report and possible direction for further research.
6. Final report will be published in a pdf booklet with an introduction and overview of the project on the ELT Ireland website in time for the conference.