

## Classroom practices and teachers' perceptions

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### Background

The Department of English and Language Studies has a long record of successful research, most of it directly related to informing departmental teaching. For example, research into classroom language teaching and teacher education by several members of the Department directly informs teaching on the postgraduate MA TESOL programme as well as short professional development courses for English language teachers and other programmes, eg Media, Allied Health and Forensic Linguistics with Policing. The Department therefore had a good and continuing record of RIT which it was keen to extend. This project meant that for the first time students would be interacting with staff in the development and implementation of a research project which would directly benefit the programme they were following.

As part of one of the modules on the MA TESOL programme, English Language Teaching (ELT) Methodology and Classroom Research, the students (all of whom are practising English teachers) conduct a small scale research project involving observation and videotaping of English classes in the Department's language teaching centre. The RIT project built on this work by producing lesson transcripts of the videotaped lessons and post-lesson interviews with teachers, thus providing data on classroom practices (in regard to teacher talk and classroom interaction) and teachers' perceptions and beliefs. This data will form the basis of publications and will also provide input material for other modules on the MA programme, particularly Language in Use (which has a component on discourse studies, including classroom discourse) and Teacher Education.

### Approach/methodology

The research consisted of a number of stages:

1. As part of the ELT Methodology and Classroom Research module the students were introduced to the tutor's own published research into teacher talk and classroom interaction and the processes involved in videoing classes and making transcripts. Other tutors presented their experience of using interviews with teachers to research teachers' beliefs and reflective practice.
2. Over five weeks students worked in pairs, with tutor support, to video record classes, conduct observations and interview teachers.
3. The students wrote up their small scale research projects as part of their assessment for the module.
4. The co-ordinator of this project worked with module tutors to produce materials for the modules using data from the students' work, ie transcript data from the lessons and interview data. This material was piloted by the tutors so students could see how the data they had collected directly informed teaching on the programme.
5. The co-ordinator worked with PhD students in the Department to transcribe the interview and classroom data collected by the students to provide a database of material for stage 6.
6. Small teams of interested staff worked together to produce two research papers from the project data.

### Outcomes

Transcripts of the classes revealed, among other things, various strategies teachers used to involve their students in conversational episodes in their EFL classes and, by doing so, developing their students' conversational English skills. They also showed how teachers constantly switched roles from 'instructor' to 'conversational partner' and back again, and how this role switching affected the kinds of classroom interaction that took place.

The data from the lesson and interview transcripts have provided a valuable resource for ongoing staff research and teaching material for use on the MA Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) programme.

The project provided staff with materials for use in their classes, and a large body of data for analysis, leading to conference presentations (eg the *Cutting Edges* international conference at CCCU in June 2009 and the annual IATEFL conference in Harrogate in April 2010) and potential publications in refereed journals. One such paper is currently being written. (IATEFL is the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language).

### Enhancing RIT

The project enhanced learning by initially getting students involved in the data collection process (observing classes, interviewing teachers, transcribing and commenting on extracts from the classes). Later the transcript material provided a valuable teaching and learning resource for students and their tutors on the MA programme.

### Advice for others

Plan the stages of the project systematically and carefully.

Consider the ethical issues involved in gaining the teachers' permission and agreement to be videotaped and to have their lessons transcribed and used for possible publication.

### Reflections and any future plans

The material output of the project (lesson and interview transcripts) is immensely useful as a source of data, much of which is still untapped and awaiting analysis. This year it has been possible to collect additional data of the same kind through the Department's quality-related research (QR) funding allocation, and to involve new staff in the research processes involved in collecting and analysing the data, with a view to writing for publication.

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