Learning from teaching practice: A case study approach

Abstract

Action research is widely recognised as an effective way for language teachers to increase their understanding of how they teach. In this article the interrelationship of action research, teaching practice, and case study analysis is discussed through an examination of teaching practice from a language teacher-educator's perspective. Strategies for language teachers as agents of their own professional renewal arise as part of this discussion.

Introduction

Many publications in the past decade have suggested that teachers can develop professionally through collaborative study of their own practice (for example, Burns 1999; Edge and Richards 1993; Freeman 1998; McNiff et al 1996). Many of these publications put teacher-educator points of view on teaching. These are not in themselves unimportant or uninteresting. What is interesting to note, however, is that in many instances teacher-educators are writing about teaching on behalf of, rather than with, teachers. With noteworthy exceptions — such as, the Languages In-service Program for Teachers (LIPT) case studies published between 1988 and 1991 by the then Education Department of South Australia, and the Teachers' Voices series published by NCELTR, Macquarie University — the writers tend to be either teacher-educators or teacher-learners who have enrolled in teacher education programs (for example, the collections of Bailey and Nunan 1996; and Freeman and Richards 1996).

Such writing is an acknowledged, excellent resource for teacher education programs, and as a teacher-educator I greatly enjoy such material and introducing it to my teacher-learners. The practising teacher who is not enrolled in a formal teacher education course, however, may never get to read — let alone produce — such material. This is regrettable since teachers’ own practice — and their analysis of it — is potentially as rich research material as any globally available teacher education publication (for example, Freeman 1996; Johnson 1999). Moreover, what teacher educators can learn from practising teachers informs their own practice as teacher-educators. One case can perhaps make this point here.
Case 1

In Issues in TESOL Curriculum, a semester-length subject in the Master of Education Studies (TESOL) at my teaching institution, teacher-learners begin by examining their understanding of teaching practice through analysis of readings from Casanave and Schechter (1997), Commins (1995), Freeman and Richards (1996), and Pennington (1992). The first assignment for this subject stems from ‘Postcard Realities’ by Fanselow (in Casanave and Schechter 1997). This reading contrasts the idyllic picture-postcard portrayal of teaching in some training programs with the harsh reality new teachers may experience once in the classroom. Teacher-learners are invited to construct their own postcard, with their own ‘idyll’ of expectations on the front and ‘message’ of reality encountered on the back. In exploring the realism of their beliefs and assumptions about TESOL practice in this way, they begin to confront the extent to which these beliefs and assumptions have been confirmed or refuted when teaching, and how unsettled they have felt as practitioners as a consequence — and to make such dissonances clear to their teacher-educators.

The assignment outlined above leads to an astonishing array of individual portrayals and analyses of teaching. One Indonesian teacher-learner in 1999 presented a greeting card in which he wrote a poem. Dadang explains his card thus:

The picture on the postcard that I sent to a friend of mine, Wanda [an Australian ESL teacher], is an ‘idealised’ image (Fanselow 1997: 159) of the Indonesian people. It is a symbol of honesty and patience. Raden Yudistira ... was never angry nor told a lie ... He is absolutely honest and trustworthy. Honesty is such a wonderful quality. I believe that being a teacher or curriculum developer, one should always be honest, always tell the truth. It is always good to be faithful in any interactions, at home, in churches, in mosques, and everywhere. One of the maxims of a successful conversation among people is the maxim of quality. As Grice (1975: 41) suggested ‘the maxim of quality states that speakers’ contributions to a conversation ought to be true. They should not say anything for which they lack adequate evidence’.

The lines that I wrote in the card, on the contrary, are the opposite of these noble characteristics and attitudes. The whole world knows and I myself am an eyewitness to what is going on in Indonesia [referring to consequences of the civil unrest at the time of the fall of Suharto].

For this student, the assignment opened a window of understanding on the professional difficulties he regularly faced in trying to meet his own personal teaching standards in contexts that denied him the opportunities his training told him he and his students deserved. Dadang’s poem concludes:

The functional-systemic approach does not work here.
They have no idea of
Michael Halliday’s work.¹
They don’t mean what they say,
neither say what they mean.
But please don’t worry,
at least I still have hope and myself.
I smell a wind of change
in the air of our sky.

Dadang’s reflections, and those of his fellow teacher-learners, developed from sharply etched group discussions of what works in particular situations — of what can realistically be striven for. Such discussion does not have to end with one writer or his collaborators, however. In this case, it spread from his teacher-educator to the teacher-educators that she worked with (see, for example, Burton, Barnett, and Clennell 1999), and through this article, could spread further. Most immediately, the following can be inferred from this episode:

❖ **Knowledge:** Practising teachers know teaching differently from their teacher-educators.

❖ **Uniqueness:** Each teacher — whether a practising teacher, teacher-learner, or teacher-educator — has a unique experience of teaching that their colleagues can learn from.

❖ **Reciprocity:** Sharing individual stories and analyses of teaching can support the growth of a collaborative professional community.

❖ **Professionalism:** Teacher-educators can encourage practising teachers and teacher-learners to find their own ways and voices of professional learning.

This and similar, earlier experiences have encouraged me to begin to re-examine what could be taken from a teacher-educator perspective and used as a method of reflection by classroom teachers in their own professional practice. I summarise below case study type reflections of how I currently view my own teaching as a teacher-educator as a way of showing how self-reflection can link in and out of practice (see also Burton 1998). In revealing some of my own recent teacher-learning, I hope to show how language teachers might begin self-reflection on teaching practice and then increasingly explore it as a step towards group reflection and collaborative analysis — and, thus, towards action research and other forms of teacher-research (for example, Allwright 1997; Freeman 1998; and Nunan 1997). How this might work is outlined in Table 1 in the conclusion of this article. My reflections in Case 2 are case study cycle 1 type reflections (see Table 1, p 19).
A teaching context for reflection

My own teaching situation is as follows:

**Case 2**

I have been a teacher-educator in TESOL for at least fifteen years — though it is hard to date the beginning of a collaborative process that can begin as soon as a teacher develops some confidence inside her or his own classroom and wants to work together more closely with other teachers.

As a teacher-educator, I am involved in formal teacher education courses and informal inservice programs, am also a TESOL editor and teacher-researcher, and have been a researcher of language teaching. My formal roles in teacher education programs and editing publications give me a straightforward mandate to work with teachers to share what I have learned about teaching and formal writing from research — my own and others’. It is assumed that I have had practical teaching experience at some point. My involvement with teachers in informal inservice programs and as a teacher-researcher is more complex.

Such involvement entails collaborative analysis of experience and expertise from shared and individual professional contexts. No one participant ‘knows’ more than another, ‘can do’ more than another. We each have individual perspectives on, and approaches to, teaching that are mutually respected and valued. We expect to learn from each other. We are all teachers and we are all learners. Our relationships are reciprocal, complementary, and mutually beneficial. Together, our individual knowledges and skills can form a powerful sense of community and support that can be promulgated beyond our own immediate sense of community.

It is only relatively recently that informal networks and collaborative relationships of these kinds have received their due (for example, Burns 1999; Burton 1997 and 1998; and Potter 2000). There is, of course, much that can still be learned about how they operate, and, in particular, how knowledge of these more informal relationships can impact on formal teacher education processes. I have found, for example, that the interplay of my formal and less formal teacher-educator roles can expand the productivity of both kinds of professional relationship.

An analysis of teaching roles

**Case 2 continued**

**Formal teacher education**

I teach in graduate and postgraduate coursework masters programs, and I supervise research students. Though there are elements of both
kinds of teaching with each kind of student, essentially coursework
teaching involves following a group curriculum of some kind with
explicit teaching objectives. On the other hand, research supervision
involves negotiation of an individual study program that increasingly
becomes the student’s to construct as he or she becomes more expert
in a chosen field of study. The supervisor-research student relationship
is dialogic and dynamic, easily recognisable as one that involves
learning and teaching on both sides (Moses 1985: 7–10).

**Informal inservice TESOL programs**

Such activities are harder to characterise. They may entail providing
sessions that are pre-negotiated with program managers, attending
a teacher meeting for a specific agenda item, running workshops
negotiated with participants, and so forth. Their ‘slipperiness’ is tied
up in the contexts in which they are negotiated and delivered. It is
possible to feel both innocent victim and energised catalyst from such
involvement. For such activities to work from teacher-educators’
perspectives, they have to know something about the context and
what the stakeholders expect of them, as well as be knowledgeable
on the subject matter.

**TESOL editing**

The editing relationship with a teacher-writer is a more intimate
teacher-educator relationship, and, therefore, potentially more
satisfying. The context and audience are relatively definable; what is
communicated is negotiable, creative. Editing for publication is the
clearest example I know of negotiating meaning, saying what you
mean, meaning what you say, of inner speech made outer. It is an
equal relationship. The writer has something to communicate; the
editor knows something of the readership, what needs to, and can be,
said. In a sense, an editor is often in the role of interpreter and as such
has a double chance to learn from the exchange — what is being said
and what is being understood. It is a role that, in my case, has spread
over into how I approach assessment of teacher-learner written
assignments and thesis supervision.

**Teacher-researching**

A teacher-researcher has some of the prerogatives of an editor: a
mandate to interpret and communicate understanding, to negotiate
meaning. The role is more directly involved in teaching practice,
however, since usually the researcher is investigating her or his own
teaching. What the researcher learns may or may not be shared with
others. In instances where it is, teachers’ research is sometimes
legitimised by institutional or system support of some kind. This
support may compromise the research depending on negotiability of 
research outcomes and products (for example, reporting and 
dissemination processes). Negotiability depends partly on whether the 
activity is intended to have specific products or outcomes, as in 
projects such as the ALL Project (Scarino et al 1988), or whether it is 
process-oriented, as in the Language Australia research nodes (for 
example, Gapper 1998). But, inevitably, as system inservice funding 
has become more accountable in the past decade, teacher-research 
projects have tended to become more product- and task-oriented, and 
less open-ended and able to sustain continuing professional self-
renewal.

Researching language teaching

As a researcher ‘of’ language teaching, the researcher tends to represent 
a context outside the language classroom being researched. Depending 
on the relationship negotiated with the teacher-as-researcher, teachers’ 
personal professional agendas (and therefore those of their students) 
may be central to the study (for example, Education Department of 
South Australia 1988–1991), minimised (for example, the Desert 
Schools Project 1996), or somewhere in between (for example, the 
Classroom Discourse Project 1998). It is possible that a researcher has 
less access to relevant data in circumstances where teachers are subjects 
rather than co-participants. Research ‘with’ participants, or co-research, 
is more liberating for all participants than research ‘on’ or ‘for’ the 
researched (see Cameron et al 1992).

While the analysis of these roles is largely personal, the metaphors of 
editor and teacher-researcher could be applied to most language teaching 
situations. Teachers frequently assist learners to say or write what they 
think and know. For this reason, teachers want to know more about how 
these processes work, and how they as professionals can more effectively 
help students to speak and write English. In my own experience as a 
language teacher-educator, I increasingly find that the role of teacher-
researcher is actually the most productive — even when my explicit role 
is teaching, researching or editing. Being a teacher-researcher involves a 
learner role and thus liberates teachers as classroom teachers, researchers, 
editors, or teacher-educators to explore a range of activities and relation-
ships.

Features of being a teacher-researcher

Communication

As a teacher-researcher, it is possible to have a more democratic 
relationship with other learners. The role frees teachers to question 
and state ignorance in ways that enable their students to challenge the
perceived limits of their own knowledge and to suggest ways of understanding that their teachers would not otherwise think of (for example, Case 1 earlier in this article). Teachers can learn as they teach if they establish a collaborative learning context.

**Collaboration**

Endorsing collaborative learning practices entails accepting varied sources of knowledge — looking beyond, for example, the group teacher or course text and suggested supplementary materials. It entails respecting all participants’ experience, expertise, and analyses: it is a mutual, reciprocal relation which can bond, define, and develop a learning group such as a language class, research community, or teaching team. It does not have to entail developing a group view; though with care it can lead to greater shared understanding [for example, the NCELTR Literacy Project (Hammond 1989), the Spoken Discourse Project (Burns 1993)]. Collaborative negotiation of meaning allows for multiple perspectives — for triangulation — with the additional benefit of a shared means — a language — of communication (for example, the Education Department of South Australia 1988–1991).

**Self-management**

The metaphor of management has been prominent in education for a long time. Initially it applied to classroom or lesson management: teachers were helped through training and with teaching materials to organise lessons in recognised ways and to control classroom behaviour. ESOL teachers are now quite often encouraged to study for MBAs as a means of professional advancement, with the result that some universities are mounting discrete educational MBAs. Within the profession, the metaphor now embraces successful teachers who are promoted to become, for example, ‘professional development manager’, ‘manager for student services’, or ‘program manager’. However, relatively little attention is paid to the concept of teachers as managers of their own immediate working contexts. Yet teaching theory recognises the importance of encouraging learners to manage their own learning. Seeing teaching as a collaborative research process is, I believe, a powerful self-management metaphor for both teacher-educators and classroom teachers to adopt.

**Professional awareness**

Central to being critically aware — and, therefore, to being a reflective teacher — is effective thinking (Dewey 1933; Kolb 1984; Schön 1983; Zeichner and Liston 1996). Vygotsky’s analysis of inner speech (for example, 1962) — which explores the interactive relationship of thinking, speaking, and knowing, and how teachers can exploit this
through working with learners in their zones of proximal development (ZPD) — highlights the role of speech and negotiation of meaning. Language teachers are involved in negotiation of meaning in three ways:

❖ **Professional discourse:** How the profession talks about language teaching (for example, NCELTR 1995ff, the Teachers’ Voices series).

❖ **Institutional discourse:** How language teaching and learning are managed (such as, policy documents and curriculum resources, for example, in an ESL context, the CSWE, 1995–1996; in an EFL context, the GBPP, 1975–1995).

❖ **Classroom discourse:** How language is used in formal learning processes (for example, the Classroom Discourse Project, 1998; the Talking About and Doing Sciences Project 1995).

**Focus**

Daily teaching and case study investigation of professional practice can, as I have suggested above, combine in a teacher-researcher approach. Ways of implementing this approach through action research are frequently recommended now for teacher-researchers (for example, Burns 1999; Freeman 1998; Water and Vilches 2000). Action research is planned intervention in a professional process. It enables teachers to focus on an issue of professional concern as part of their teaching practice. For example, a teacher wants to try a new teaching strategy, and plans, implements and evaluates its use. It is a simple model (see Kemmis and McTaggart 1982), validated by widespread professional use, that can be applied in a single classroom or collaboratively in a teaching program.

**Action research as a way of teaching**

Action research consists of a series of repetitive steps. The concept, described by a number of researchers (for example, Altrichter et al 1993; Carr and Kemmis 1986; Edge and Richards 1993; McNiff 1992; Wallace 1998), comprises having a plan, acting on it, and observing and reflecting on the action. These steps are not part of a closed circle, but form a spiral of continuous, connected and progressive cycles of learning from professional practice. Such cycles do not necessarily form a neat, even spiral. But the action research spiral, however messy, portrays an unbroken chain of development. See, for example, Figure 1.
With very little lateral thinking, this concept can be seen as fundamental to everything teachers do. Each open-ended cycle links every aspect of teaching activity:

- **Classroom teaching**: Teachers plan units of work, they teach, they reflect on the success or otherwise of what they have taught (for example, whether it has met their initial objectives and student expectations, and fulfilled institutional requirements).

- **Course development**: To varying degrees, teachers decide how to organise a course, they teach, they reflect on the extent to which a course is successful (for example, a post-beginners’ ESL course for adult learners in the workplace).

- **Materials development**: In a range of ways, depending on the teaching approach, teachers design, select, and work with teaching materials, and evaluate their usefulness in learning processes.
❖ **Learning achievement:** To varying degrees, teachers determine learning outcomes, they teach, they assess learning achievement.

Thus, all teaching activities involve similar professional practice: planning, acting, and reflecting on outcomes. Action research is a way of stressing the planning and reflection aspects of teaching so that they become professional supports. Action research, therefore, is a way of teaching that enables teachers to see purpose and development in what they do every day. It does not require extra work of teachers. Instead, it strengthens teachers as decision-makers, implementers of purposeful action, and reflective practitioners.

For example, a colleague and I are analysing a new application of task-based learning in an EFL context (Burton and Daroon, case study in progress). This has involved EFL learners as discourse analysts of their own language output and the use of their texts as a major source of course content. The work began with Daroon as action-researcher developing open-ended discourse tasks as part of her postgraduate research. Considering teacher education implications was a natural outcome of collaborative reflection on the effectiveness of the curriculum innovation.

Other cases of successful action research collaboration can be found in many of the publications cited in this article. Such case studies report teachers’ decision-making and analyse its implementation. Case studies are a relatively simple way of capturing professional action and making it available for wider discussion, and therefore, collaborative learning.

**Case studies as a means of collaborative learning**

Using cross-case analysis can help teachers establish connections across different teacher-research situations experienced over a number of years (Burton 1998). Using this approach is not limited to one teacher’s professional practice but, as I have argued, is a foundation for linking with other teachers’ experiences. Thus, Figure 1 could be made much messier when one teacher’s experiences become connected with those of other teachers. As collaborative research communities begin to operate, a procedural pattern may begin to evolve and, at least for a time, teachers’ developmental pathways may merge. When such communities survive, a context for longitudinal, ethnographic and evaluative analysis of the communities is also established (for example, Potter 2000).

Potter worked with a small group of primary school teachers to analyse their perceptions of teaching literacy and the impact of their analysis on individual practice. The research group met regularly to report and analyse investigations they had each conducted in their own schools on similar areas of concern. Potter recorded and analysed their group interaction and fed this back to them at the beginning of each
meeting. At the end of each meeting, the group set itself a common task. For example, for the second meeting each teacher-researcher began a detailed written case study of selected students, including each student’s literacy requirements, and an analysis of the student’s parents’ understanding of literacy teaching. The case studies were completed during the period of the existence of the research community, along with Potter’s own critical analysis of the teacher-researcher community. Because the case studies and Potter’s own case study of the community were written, they are available for circulation and analysis beyond the community that wrote them. Thus, case studies can form an important source of research analysis on teaching (for example, Bailey and Nunan 1996; Freeman and Richards 1996; Dyson and Genishi 1994). As theorists such as Yin (1994) acknowledge, case-study research can be an important preliminary stage to, or component of, large-scale research. Stake (1995: 92–3) offers additional arguments: Teachers as case-study researchers can better anticipate some of the unexpected — and otherwise undetected — learning outcomes, and through more confident, detailed knowledge of learning processes become more effective advocates for the profession.

**Writing case studies**

Teachers tend to find the *doing* of action research — planning, implementing and reflecting — relatively manageable and stimulating. Writing it up as a further means of personal and collaborative reflection seems to pose more difficulties, particularly when the writing is done after rather than *throughout* the research cycle. Yet in most cases, teacher-writers could follow a simple narrative format and tell their stories as they unfold in action. Narrative structure complements action research very well. Stories have a starting point or focus, describe what took place or was done, and interpret the action in some way. In their conclusions, writers can also suggest and comment on what could happen next, or, through their stories, seek this advice from others. Some example formats follow:

**Example 1**

A simple format for short case studies is illustrated in *Teaching in action* (Richards 1998). Each case has the following sections:

- Context
- Problem
- Solution
- Comments by ...

The comments were written by a specialist in the case-study topic. In a less formal setting than a published book, comments could be sought from a teaching colleague or co-teacher.
Example 2

Chapters in a new series being published by TESOL, Inc. in the USA called *Case studies in TESOL practice* are organised as follows:

❖ Introduction
❖ Context
❖ Description
❖ Distinguishing features
❖ Practical suggestions
❖ Conclusion.

The first chapter in each volume is an analysis by the volume editor of the issues, strengths, gaps, and range of practice on the topic focus of the volume. This analysis provides an additional, broader context for reflection that supports teacher-readers in bridging the gap from the written contexts to their own situations. To date, this series has 15 titles in various stages of preparation (details can be found on TESOL’s website <http://www.tesol.org>). The first volume, on teacher education, was published earlier this year (Johnson 2000). Volumes edited by Hanson-Smith on technology and teaching, Leki on teaching academic writing, and Edge on action research are in press at the time of writing.

Example 3

The LIPT case study writers (Education Department of South Australia 1988–1991) took more individual directions, but still had simple story structures, for example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Format A</th>
<th>Format B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting the scene</td>
<td>My dilemma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial stages</td>
<td>Intercepted by LIPT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reservations</td>
<td>We have Lift-off!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We begin</td>
<td>The plot thickens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The course</td>
<td>Results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And the first lesson</td>
<td>Parents’ questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... With good results</td>
<td>Ever onwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But after the sunshine ...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The results come ...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did I feel?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On reflection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The future</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One strength of publishing teachers’ case studies in commercial form is the collaborative analysis they can stimulate between teacher-writers and reviewers. Other more informal connections are made through teacher-readers and the wider professional community — particularly where structures are in place for collaborative reflection.

Case studies can first be enjoyed more informally, however. I have already suggested advantages in teachers reconceptualising practice as action research — that is, as open-ended cycles of planning, implementation, and reflection. Many teachers already keep teaching journals as an adjunct to reflection. It is relatively easy to format journal entries to create case studies (using a structure along the lines, perhaps, of one outlined above). Written story-telling of this kind enables teacher-researchers to focus their reflection in ways that can invite feedback from other teachers. Thus, the kind of learning through social interaction advocated by Vygotsky (for example 1962) can become real for teachers as well as for their students.

Some participants in a whole-day research symposium at the TESOL 2000 Convention in Vancouver that incorporated analysis of teachers’ case studies of action research responded as follows:

**What have I learned today that I could realistically incorporate in my teaching?**

I like the idea that action research can be a part of lesson planning ... I also found it helpful to think of reflection as description, reaction, and analysis ...

Reflection — what makes the difference between description and reaction.

Learning to focus on what is possible.

That ‘good teaching’ is the process (ours) rather than the product (of someone else).

**What do I want to say about teacher research and reflection?**

It’s a good idea that allows individuals, both students and teacher, to facilitate problem-solving and goal-setting.

‘If we are passionate and committed to teaching we have to be involved in the responsibility to reflect.’

... should be a fundamental part of every teacher education program

**What feedback would I like to give the presenters about today’s session?**

The key idea I’ll take away is ... I start with the context my students and I share and move on from there. No other idea will probably ever impact on my teaching more.

(Burton, Edge and Stanley 2000)
Conclusion

The studies used in the workshop were less polished than cases studies in volumes such as Bailey and Nunan (1996), and Freeman and Richards (1996). Interesting and useful as such volumes are, teachers respond best to the immediacy of cases that teachers write when supported to reflect (as in Education Department of South Australia 1988–1991; Gapper 1998). The feedback quoted above indicates the enthusiasm with which teachers respond to action research and case studies when they experience practical reflection processes and analyse case studies written by teachers. Such feedback is far from unique; it is typical of inservice days and programs, and TESOL projects that feature such research and teaching approaches. Teachers find such case studies recognisable (Burton 1998) and trustworthy (Freeman 1998).

What needs to be done to make sure teachers can do more action research and case-study writing? This is not a straightforward question. A simple answer is to reply with another question: until education is funded and structured in ways that support action research and case-study reflection as ways of teaching, can change in TESOL practice be expected? But this is an inadequate response, though undeniably a reasonable one. Changes are occurring in some teaching locations. Teachers do initiate changes in practice — despite system and institutional constraints, et cetera. Most promising for the long term is that most, if not all, TESOL education programs now introduce teacher-learners to reflective practice at the beginning of their teacher training. Case-study analysis is a means of confronting teacher-learners with the realities of their professional contexts and the continuing importance of reflective cycles of teaching (for example, Case 1, this article).

Table 1 represents a framework in which I think teacher-learners can be encouraged to see and structure their professional practice. With this structure in mind, I began thinking about a new student who has just joined the postgraduate program where I teach:

Case 3: A beginning

Lin3 is a TESOL masters student from a communist country. She is preparing her first assignment in Issues in TESOL Curriculum. We discuss the two sides of the postcard. She is deep into the message on the back. In the fourth session, she vividly portrays her role as transmitter of textbook content to students preparing for an unknown and not necessarily related external examination. Her students are forced to learn material that will not, in her professional opinion, meet their EFL needs. She is compelled to use provided teaching material because if her students fail the examination that governs their future careers she as their teacher can be penalised by the teaching institution and the State. In such a setting, it seems that an EFL specialist is little more
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action research</th>
<th>Teaching cycles</th>
<th>Case study cycles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cycle 1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cycle 1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cycle 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan</td>
<td>Plan</td>
<td>Write journal entries on teacher-research plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establish ways of preserving teaching data: eg, observing classroom activity. Determine how to evaluate classroom activity in relation to course and system requirements (have copies of relevant curriculum policy documents to refer to)</td>
<td>Maintain journal narrative on teaching activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teach and collect data: eg, lesson materials, student work samples (written and spoken)</td>
<td>Write up reflections and evaluation for Cycle 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflect</td>
<td>Analyse teaching data, collaboratively if possible. Cycle 1 will suggest other information you need to collect and ways to analyse, and will lead naturally into Cycle 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cycle 2</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cycle 2</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cycle 2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan</td>
<td>Plan</td>
<td>Re-start journal by writing about Cycle 2 plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop teaching plan and activities in response to Cycle 1 evaluation</td>
<td>Maintain journal, discussing teaching with colleagues where possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teach and collect data, adapting and refining data collection as necessary</td>
<td>Write up reflections and evaluation for Cycle 2. Seek feedback on case study from colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflect</td>
<td>Analyse teaching data, adapting and refining process as necessary and working collaboratively if possible. Try to think ahead to Cycle 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cycle 3</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cycle 3</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cycle 3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue as for Cycle 2</td>
<td>Continue as for Cycle 2</td>
<td>Continue as for Cycle 2. Try seeking feedback beyond immediate teaching context: eg, give a workshop at local teachers’ association or a conference presentation, think about submitting your case study to a journal (eg TESOL in context, Prospect)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
than hapless instrument of an uncaring state. Yet, Lin is relieved to be able to examine and explain her sense of helplessness. Her analysis and project work this semester is intended to support her in developing a workable professional framework of her own to take home. Therefore, Lin is not yet ready with an evocative picture (as Dadang finally selected in Case 1) for the front of her postcard. She is busy coming to terms with needing to identify steps such as those in Table 1 for her return to teaching in her country next year.

Collaborative reflection and case study analysis will, I hope, make a difference to Lin.

Acknowledgment

Dadang Jaelani’s permission to quote from his assignment is greatly appreciated.

Notes

1 See, for example, Halliday 1994.
2 Managing classroom behaviour is still viewed by teachers as a central teaching responsibility. See, for example, the Classroom Discourse Project, 1998.
3 The student’s identity, but not the circumstances, has been altered.

References


Allwright, D 1997, Summer. ‘Quality and sustainability in teacher-research’. TESOL Quarterly, 31, 2: 368–70


Burns, A 1993. ‘Spoken discourse and power’. Prospect, 8, 1–2: 61–76


Education Department of South Australia 1988–1991. LIPT (Languages In-service Program for Teachers) action research reports (29 vols). Adelaide: Languages and Multicultural Centre
Gapper, S (ed) 1998. Learning about literacy as teacher-researchers. Adelaide: University of South Australia (Language Australia Child ESL and Literacy Research SA Node)
Hammond, J 1989. ‘The NCELTR literacy project’. Prospect, 5, 1: 23–30


McNiff, J 1992. *Creating a good social order through action research*. Poole, Dorset, UK: Hyde Publications


Pennington, M C 1992. ‘Second class or economy? The status of the English language teaching profession in tertiary education’. *Prospect*, 7, 3: 7–19


