Teacher Research 2.0

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Introduction

The Electronic Village Online (EVO) was established in 2000 as a special project of TESOL's CALL Interest Section. It offers five weeks of free professional development sessions in a collaborative online learning environment for English language educators around the world. Open to anyone with a computer or smart phone and an internet connection, EVO is organised by volunteer coordinators. A variety of sessions are offered each year, ranging from Design Thinking to Techno-CLIL.

In 2016, the first Classroom-based Research EVO was designed by Kenan Dikilitaş and Asli Lidice Gokturk Saglam. Many of the participants turned out to be teachers working in 'difficult circumstances', e.g. large classes, with limited resources, in developing country contexts (cf. Smith 2011). Accordingly, for the following year, Kenan and Asli invited Richard Smith to take a lead in incorporating ideas from the 'Teacher-research for difficult circumstances' impact initiative (warwick.ac.uk/trdc) into the EVO. The 2017 EVO project, led by a team of ten volunteer teacher educators and supported by several English language teacher associations worldwide, provided a hands-on introduction to inquiry-based teacher development, especially (though not exclusively) targeted at those working in difficult circumstances.

Overall approach

Close to 800 teachers joined the project's Facebook group and thereby gained exposure to session materials, while 272 participants from 54 different countries also joined the Google+ community where most of the active sharing of responses to weekly tasks occurred. Tasks and associated weekly webinars took participants through different stages of teacher-research, gradually building confidence in a practical way. Examples of the realistic steps teachers can take to understand and address classroom challenges were derived from recent project experiences in Chile, Nepal and India, with Paula Rebolledo (Chile) and Amol Padwad (India) acting at times as co-presenters with Richard, as well as Asli and Kenan.

The fact that webinar recordings as well as other materials were freely available online (and still remain available, at classroombasedresearch.weebly.com) meant that teachers who might otherwise have little access to professional development and networking opportunities could become involved at times convenient to them, even though internet accessibility and bandwidth issues sometimes hampered 'live' participation during webinars.

Weekly sessions and activities

In week 1, participants introduced themselves and shared features of their teaching context. This helped to build a sense of community and investment for participants. Before considering the challenges they faced in the classroom, participants also shared a recent story of success in their teaching. As has been the case in other work (see Smith, Padwad and Bullock, forthcoming), sharing success stories served as good confidence-building experience, and participants were able to develop ideas for further research and action on this positive basis.

1.You and your classroom	2.A recent success in your teaching	3.Identifying a focus, and research questions
4.Practical tools for exploratory research	5.Anlaysing and interpreting evidence	6. How teachers can share their research

EVO 2017 'Classroom-based research for Professional Development' topics

Participants were then supported by means of website materials, webinars, online mentoring and peer-mentoring to identify a focus and develop research questions An early activity invited participants to consider challenges or activities that had not gone as well as intended, and from this to identify what they needed to understand further. Participants then considered possible sources of evidence for answering questions and started to design appropriate ways of gathering information. For example, one participant wanted to know how students feel about doing homework and what they would prefer doing instead of the standard type she gives. She then decided to collect evidence from questionnaires and project work. A number of ways of analysing and interpreting data were suggested, and finally participants were shown how to share their findings in innovative, teacher-friendly formats.

Outcomes

Participants' completed projects (see classroombasedresearch.weebly.com/outcomes) and their evaluation feedback added evidence to that from recent projects (see warwick.ac.uk/trdc) that *realistic forms* of teacher-research can help teachers gain agency in relation to the difficult circumstances they find themselves in (cf. Rebolledo, Smith and Bullock, 2016). By taking control of their own development via teacher-research, teachers can experience increased confidence and develop a greater capacity to explore and improve teaching and learning, in other words, their teacher autonomy is engaged and enhanced. We found that participants came to perceive a lack of resources and lack of teacher-research training or experience to be less of a barrier than they had initially thought.

Via online, interactive and collaborative means, the EVO had an impact on a larger number of teachers than has previously been reached via face-to-face workshops and mentoring (hence our title, 'Teacher research 2.0'). Although we were pleased with the numbers of participants both registering and staying with us, a question now in our minds is 'Where to go from here?'. We have developed appropriate content and an appropriate approach but the challenge now is to 'leverage' this into something more long-lasting, with even wider and deeper impact.

References

Rebolledo, P., Smith, R. and Bullock, D. (eds) (2016) *Champion Teachers: Stories of Exploratory Action Research*. London: British Council.

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