

How can English teachers develop appropriate methodology? How can they have autonomy?

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1 Introduction

The title of this chapter contains the two linked questions which, I now realize, have guided my work, including my research work, since I first became involved in ELT (English Language Teaching) teacher education in the mid-1990s. The questions began to emerge even earlier, in fact, as professional puzzles challenging me as an English teacher in Japan, from the mid-1980s onwards. In writing about these questions I will follow quite closely the suggested outline given to presenters / authors:

- Name and explain the questions;
- Identify the “topic the questions are embedded in”;
- Explain why the questions are interesting and important for you;
- Illustrate whether you have already (partly) found answers to the questions;
- Show how the question(s) might shape foreign language research.

2 Name and explain the questions

The task of identifying my “grand”, by which I understand “overriding” or “overarching”, research questions was, perhaps surprisingly, difficult for me, since my research has been somewhat eclectic, following interests which have not emerged in a linear fashion, but often in parallel and at different times. Recently I’ve been focusing largely (though not entirely) on research in the field of history of English language teaching, and a question currently uppermost in my mind that I considered explaining is:

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- How can history help us better understand language teaching? Specifically ... How can history help professionals in the field of English language teaching gain new perspectives on language teaching methodology?

However, I didn't select this in the end, instead choosing to delve deeper and come to what I think are the questions that have been motivating my work at a broader, more fundamental and more generative level. To uncover these I had to look again, beyond the field of history, taking in the other fields I've been concerned with during my career (for example, learner autonomy, and the promotion of teacher-research), and which I'll explain and discuss below. It seems to me, from this broader perspective, that underlying all my work have been the following questions.

Q1: How can English teachers [in public education systems and in "difficult circumstances"] develop appropriate methodology?

Q2: How can they have autonomy?

I've qualified the first question here with "in public education systems" and "in difficult circumstances" because I have always felt particularly committed to the issues facing teachers in the public sector in different countries and have become more and more interested and involved in support, in particular, for teachers in "difficult circumstances", which I'll define below. Apart from "difficult circumstances", other key concepts underlying these questions which need to be defined at the outset are "appropriate methodology" and "autonomy".

First, let's consider "appropriate methodology", a phrase which began to be used in ELT circles in the late 1980s and early 1990s. One way to think about this, perhaps, is to begin with the earlier notion of "appropriate technology", which came to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s. The economist Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, in his 1973 book *Small is Beautiful*, discussed how technology can be developed on a human scale using locally available resources, with a focus on needs for wellbeing and environmental sustainability, in a decentralized, locally autonomous, people-centred way. For Schumacher and his followers, the promotion of appropriate technology was an alternative to voracious capitalist expansionism, also known as 'globalization', and to inappropriate technology transfer or imposition from relatively 'developed' to 'less developed' settings.

These notions also relate quite well to "appropriate methodology", a term which was popularized by Adrian Holliday via his 1994 book *Appropriate Methodology and Social Context*. This was one of a group of influential publications in the 1990s which together constituted a turning-point in the

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discourse of ELT – a time of “critical turn”, in fact. Works by Pennycook (1994, 1998), Phillipson (1992), and Canagarajah (1999), as well as Holliday (1994), critiqued the notion that ELT is somehow a neutral, apolitical enterprise, and showed instead how it may serve the interests of English-dominant nations. Phillipson’s (1992) *Linguistic Imperialism* in particular, was a shocking book for many in the field of ELT, especially for native speaker teachers of English around the world. Holliday’s (1994) book was equally critical but more methodologically focused, showing that methods of supposed universal relevance may not work in contexts which are quite different from those in which they were originally developed.

So, since the 1990s, from an awareness of the inappropriateness of top-down / centre-periphery solutions there has arisen a general acknowledgement of the need for context-sensitive approaches. A general perception has arisen that methodologies have to be locally appropriate and locally determined, not ‘universalist’ in inspiration. A major implication of this is that teachers themselves are central to the task of developing appropriate methodology, being the only true “experts” about their own contexts. Given that teachers know their students and their context better than outsiders, how, though, can they be supported to develop appropriate methodology? We know that top-down solutions tend to fail, suffering from “tissue rejection” according to Holliday’s (1994) surgical metaphor. How, though, can we be constructive? There have been many critiques but fewer constructive attempts to replace top-down conceptions, and I have been trying to help fill this gap in my own work.

In this area, we need to be very aware of the importance of *context*. Small language school type classrooms in Britain may have been where communicative language teaching was first developed but most teaching in the world is not carried out in that type of context. Instead, the commonest worldwide ELT situation is a primary or secondary school classroom where teachers share the same language as the students. This is the kind of context I’ve been most concerned with, in my early teaching in Japan, in my subsequent teacher education work there, and in my teacher education work in the UK.

I’ve been especially focusing on what I’ve been calling “difficult circumstances” (e. g., Smith 2011a). By this, I mean the large-class, relatively low-resource settings which face the majority of teachers in the world (“normal” circumstances for most teachers worldwide, in other words). Michael West originally coined this phrase in his (1960) book *Teaching English in Difficult Circumstances*, defining “unfavourable” or “difficult” circumstances as

a class consisting of over 30 pupils (more usually 40 or even 50), congested on benches [...] accommodated in an unsuitably shaped room, ill-graded, with a teacher who perhaps does not speak English very well or very fluently, working in a hot climate. Moreover the pupils in such schools are more subject to Elimination [i.e., drop-out] than those who are more favourably circumstanced. (p. 1)

West had been committed to teacher education in colonial India (Bengal) from the 1910s to the early 1930s and sought answers to how teachers *can* teach large classes with very few resources, but his lead was not really followed as ELT expanded in the 1960s and 1970s in the UK itself. The focus shifted within British ELT away from secondary school contexts and towards ideas, techniques and materials developed for relatively small, well-resourced, more ‘comfortable’ classrooms. The “difficult circumstances” facing most teachers in the world have remained dysfunctionally neglected in mainstream ELT literature – there is still relatively little research on primary and secondary education in global south contexts, despite its prevalence.

A third key concept is “autonomy”. For the purposes of this chapter, I wish to focus on the concept of *teacher* autonomy, or at least one aspect of it, which I term “teacher-learner autonomy”. Let’s take this step by step. Here is the “Bergen definition” of learner autonomy, which views this as:

a readiness to take charge of one’s own learning in the service of one’s own needs and purposes. This entails a capacity and willingness to act independently and in cooperation with others, as a social, responsible person (Dam et al. 1990: 102).

I like this definition because it emphasizes the *social* nature of learner autonomy. (Sometimes people think “autonomy” must be very individualistic but this is a misconception.) A lot of my earliest published work related to my practice in the field of autonomy, and out of this practice I developed the notion of “teacher-learner autonomy”, viewing teachers themselves as learners. Thus, “teacher-learner autonomy” can be defined as “the ability to develop appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes for oneself as a teacher, in cooperation with others” (Smith & Erdogan 2008: 83). Teacher-learner autonomy is one aspect of the broader notion of “teacher autonomy”. This is often seen as “freedom from constraints”, but, more realistically perhaps (since we can never be completely free), it involves exploring, negotiating with others (including students) and exploiting “spaces of freedom” or “spaces for manoeuvre”. However constrained the situation seems to be, there may be areas where you can make changes. I have come to see a teacher’s ability to make changes according to

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what she/he sees as important and relevant, for one's own benefit, and for and with one's students, as essential in the development of appropriate methodology.

3 Identify the 'topic the questions are embedded in'

As I've already highlighted, my questions relate to what I would term a post-1990 "critical turn" in ELT, resting on the assumption that relatively context-sensitive approaches to ELT methodology are necessary. The general topic area is ELT methodology, relating to this "critical turn". My assumption is that we need to find alternatives to teachers being told to adopt the latest fashionable approach based on linguistics, psychology or other background disciplines and thinking they have to implement that, in a top-down process. Put another way, alternatives need to be developed which don't involve inviting "experts" from outside to identify what teachers should be doing in their classrooms. We need more bottom-up alternatives which recognize, build on and enhance teachers' own expertise and self-esteem. And for this, there is a need for teachers to have autonomy. Hence the rationales for my questions:

"Grand Question" 1 ("How can English teachers develop appropriate methodology?") seeks to identify and/or bring into being *suitable foundations for language teaching*, given what we know about the inappropriateness of top-down / centre-periphery proposals in the past.

"Grand Question" 2 ("How can English teachers have autonomy?") seeks to identify and/or bring about *suitable conditions and procedures* for teachers to develop appropriate methodology "from the bottom up".

Both are *practical* questions relating to teacher education – "research & development questions" not just abstract research questions. Not only will answers be relevant to teacher education practice, the answers themselves may be derived from reflecting on and theorizing from practical work in the teacher education field.

I also see the questions as being in a tradition, with antecedents in previous practice-oriented attempts to move language teaching beyond (prescriptive) methods. Indeed, the desire to find a solid "non-method" basis for ELT goes back many years: it isn't new, despite the way Kumaravadivelu (e. g., 1994) claimed in the 1990s that we were just then entering a post-method era. There were predecessors in this endeavour, for example:

- H.H. Stern's (1983) *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching*, which was recommended as a key text at the time of my MA studies in the late 1980s. I like(d) the way both *educational* and *historical* foundations were

established for language teaching theory, alongside linguistics, psychology and sociology.

- W. F. Mackey's (1965) *Language Teaching Analysis* broke down different methods into component parts via what Mackey termed 'methodics', raising the possibility of reassembly by teachers themselves according to need.
- Harold E. Palmer's (1917) *The Scientific Study and Teaching of Languages* was perhaps the first attempt to establish a science of language teaching. His subsequent work with teachers in Japan showed how a principled, eclectic approach could be an alternative to "method" (Smith 2011b).
- Henry Sweet's (1899) *The Practical Study of Languages* was another early attempt to counter the dominance of 'method' over language teaching, even though Sweet was rather dogmatically attached to phonetics as the "indispensable foundation" of language-study.

Let us pursue this historical side-track a little further, since I believe it can show how my questions are in a particular "mainstream" of prioritizing the needs of practitioners, even if this need may have been lost sight of in present-day applied linguistics. Focusing on Palmer, in particular, we can see that in 1917 he argued for a new science of language teaching on the following basis: "Ce n'est pas la méthode qui nous manque; ce qui nous manque c'est la base même de la méthode" ["It is not 'method' that we lack; what we lack is a basis for method" (my translation)] (Palmer 1917: 5-6). Palmer believed that there were plenty of ideas and methods in existence and that what teachers really needed was a basis for *choosing* the best method for a particular context, since, as he put it, 'no one programme can possibly be ideally suitable for all classes of students' (Palmer 1917: 16). As a language teacher in Belgium, Palmer had himself "explored the possibilities of one method after another, both as teacher and student. He would devise, adopt, modify or reject one plan after another as the result of further research and experience in connexion with many languages – living and artificial" (Anderson 1969: 136-7).

Palmer was always a practitioner researcher as much as an academic, indeed his approach resembled what we now call "action research". "Scientific method", according to Palmer (1917: 20), should aim to do the following:

- (a) to collect isolated facts and factors in such numbers as to cover the whole field of inquiry,
- (b) to classify, examine, and correlate them,

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- (c) to draw from them certain conclusions upon which the fundamental principles may be established and stated in categorical terms,
- (d) to confirm and justify these principles by putting them to the test of actual and continual practice.

For Palmer, the science of language teaching was not, then, about applying insights directly from background disciplines such as psychology and linguistics but, instead, a process of *trying out*, seeing if principles worked in practice and, if not, then modifying them.

As is probably clear, I favour what I have termed Palmer's kind of "alternative" applied linguistics (Smith 2011b). It is a relatively bottom-up conception compared with the kind of 'linguistics applied' (Widdowson 2000) which became heavily dominant after World War II. Despite shifts to a more autonomous role for applied linguistics since then, "linguistics applied" is always in danger of reasserting itself when academics follow their own priorities rather than those of language teachers themselves.

4 Explain why the questions are interesting and important for you

The interest value and importance for me of the questions I have chosen relates to my own development in Japan and the crisis of professional identity I experienced there, quite early on in my ELT career. At the time of the overall "critical turn" in ELT which I identified above, I was teaching in Japan. I had been employed, initially, to be an English teacher in Japanese schools simply because I was a native speaker of English. No particular qualifications were needed, but just because I came from Britain and was a native speaker with a degree I was able to get quite a well-paid job as an assistant English teacher in a Japanese high school. My personal story in the late 1980s and early 1990s had been one of coming to recognize the limitations of the view of ELT that just because English came from Britain, therefore Britain has all of the expert knowledge about ELT. This is a myth which took me some time to understand as such in my career. I did understand it, though, after a few years teaching in Japan when my favoured communicative approach wasn't working very well in a Japanese secondary school classroom of 45 students in rows, in a strictly disciplined setting where the focus was much more on translation and learning about grammar than on communication.

I had a kind of identity crisis, I suppose, where my confidence and core beliefs were challenged. I had believed I was going to Japan to help Japanese teachers to teach in a better way. The British Council gave an orientation in

which they were trying to persuade us that this was legitimate. It was very much a missionary or neo-colonial kind of mission. In the late 1980s/early 1990s, as I said, I began to question these assumptions.

At the same time, in the field of ELT discourse self-questioning was happening more generally. A lot seemed to change with the fall of the Iron Curtain. This opened up Eastern Europe to the American and British versions of TESOL and ELT, respectively. The British Council wanted to help teachers to convert from teaching Russian to teaching English, with supplementary funding from the Soros Foundation and the British government. Doubtless, this was partially motivated by a desire to support sales of books and export of British and American expertise. However, attitudes seemed to change within the British Council, also, as experts on the ground gained understanding that teachers in Eastern European contexts had their own traditions and expertise. It could be said that this represented the beginning of a shift of perspectives in the field towards more devolved, less centralized conceptions.

So, there was a general turn in ELT towards looking for alternatives to the myth that ELT expertise must come from English-speaking nations. I was experiencing the same shift in my own consciousness in Japan. This was a formative time for me and since then I have been looking for more appropriate methodologies – bottom-up, context-sensitive approaches.

Thus, I experienced my own “critical turn” in 1990s Japan – I was a teacher seeking an alternative to a “weak version” of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), not necessarily influenced by any particular literature in this area, but deriving sustenance from the emerging critical literature. Slightly later, I began to develop experience as a teacher educator, in Japan – again, in this role, I was seeking *alternatives* to (the imposition of) CLT. Later, after I moved to the UK in 2000 and became more familiar with the problems of teachers in the Global South (via teachers from there who were coming to study in Britain as well as consultancy visits to countries in Latin America and South Asia, in particular), my pursuit of appropriate methodology and teacher autonomy became even more focused on “difficult circumstances” and on primary and secondary school teaching.

So, in the ways described above, I could say that my “grand questions” are completely grounded in my (professional) autobiography.

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5 Illustrate whether you have already (partly) found answers to the questions

I would say that my research trajectory has not been like natural scientific research, where there are (supposed to be) quite clear hypotheses, procedures and findings, and a sense of building one finding on top of another – instead, I'd prefer to say my research has developed organically in response to professional concerns in my career. I haven't had a particular method always in mind but, looking back, I can see I've used what I might call "*documentation*" a lot. In other words, I've mainly been documenting and writing about what other people and I myself have done in quite practical teaching and teacher education terms, on the basis of data including archival sources, oral recordings and interviews, teacher-research reports, and so on. Below I try to catalogue some of what I feel I have achieved in this rather wayward research and development trajectory, under a number of themes, moving broadly from my early to my later career.

5.1 Pedagogy of autonomy as appropriate methodology

In a search for greater "appropriateness" in my own practice in Japan in the 1990s (as reported, for example, in Smith 2001, 2002, 2003), I began to base my teaching very much on what my students themselves felt they should be doing in class. I came to know this as "autonomy-oriented" practice. I began to document this, not as a way of saying "other teachers should do this" but as a means to reflect on and further develop my practice, which I conceived as consisting of a combination of pedagogy of autonomy and action research. For me, this was a "becoming-appropriate" way of teaching in large classes in Japan

With Naoko Aoki I founded a Special Interest Group within the Japan Association for Language Teaching – the Learner Development SIG. Overall, I could say that at this time in my career I was doing practitioner research related to the overall notion of how to develop appropriate methodology; and I was developing autonomy in my own practice – a reaction against the kind of communicative methodology I had been socialized into as a neophyte teacher.

5.2 Naming and understanding "teacher-learner autonomy"

I first came up with the notion of "teacher-learner autonomy" in relation to teachers' language learning, out of my own experience of learning Japanese in Japan (Smith 2000). We had a group of people reflecting on our own language learning and our own autonomy, and how that related to our teaching, within the JALT Learner Development SIG mentioned above.

The second area of teacher-learning / teacher-learner autonomy I considered from a practical and theoretical perspective was in relation to workshop and conference design (Barfield & Smith 1999). A group of us in JALT tried to do teacher development events differently, involving much more interactivity and participant-centredness to engage teachers' own autonomy. Later, I took this forward into the "Teachers Research!" series of events and conferences in the UK, Turkey and Latin America (cf. Bullock & Smith 2015). This has been another case where I've felt that "actions speak as loudly as words" in my research career.

A final area of teacher-learning where teacher-learner autonomy is engaged and can be developed is within action research. After moving to Britain I transferred my pedagogy for autonomy approach into my work with teachers, and I engaged my student teachers in doing small action research projects as part of their teacher training. I realized more and more that the purpose of this was to develop their autonomy as learners of teaching (e. g., Smith & Erdoğan 2008). As I had found in Japan in my own practice, and as I was discovering in this teacher education situation, action research can be seen as a privileged means of developing autonomy for teachers, however difficult it may seem, because teachers can take more control over their development through researching their own classrooms.

5.3 Historical sense as a foundation

At the same time as developing my practice and associated research in the above two areas, during the 1990s in Japan I was laying further foundations for my own autonomy as a teacher educator, this time via discoveries about the history of English teaching, specifically in Japan but, as it turned out, also with wider relevance. I came to an appreciation of the work, in particular, of Harold E. Palmer and the Institute for Research in English Teaching which he set up in Tokyo (e. g., Smith 1999), coming to realize that Japanese teachers' own appreciation of this work was a means by which they could limit the harmful effects of attempted impositions from outside – thus, I began to develop a belief in "historical sense" (Smith 2013) as a neglected potential basis for teacher education, relating to teacher-learner autonomy again.

I also came to a better appreciation of ELT roots and tradition via my PhD studies and this enabled me to engage in deconstructive work with regard to dominant method mythologies (Howatt & Smith 2014; Hunter & Smith 2012), countering these with historical insights. I also researched and wrote about how what is going on in well-established *traditions* of typical teaching in primary and

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secondary schools can serve as a basis for methodology development and not just be viewed as a constraint (Smith with Imura 2004). This ties in well, I believe, with some of the historical research work which is being done at the University of Bremen by Sabine Doff and Tim Giesler

I have been attempting to promote historical research in various ways (cf. Smith 2016), particularly hoping to encourage more research into the local histories of English teaching in different contexts around the world. Historical research is generally very neglected as a form of research in our field, though it can provide a useful source for thinking about appropriate methodology or at least a means for teachers to gain a greater sense of autonomy in relation to methodological fashions and other top-down impositions.

5.4 An “enhancement approach” to teaching in difficult circumstances

Basing teacher development work on teachers’ shared stories of success is something I’ve been involved with a lot recently, which has been both enjoyable and fruitful. In 2008 I co-founded TELCnet (bit.ly/telcnet-home) – the Teaching English in Large Classes research network – with Fauzia Shamim, a teacher educator based in Pakistan. This has aimed to promote research about teaching in large classes and difficult circumstances generally, with a particular focus on gathering narratives from teachers and disseminating these (cf. Smith 2011a). I’ve also been lucky enough to work directly with teachers in different countries, mainly Chile, Cameroon, India and Nepal.

One of the positive stories documented (in Kuchah & Smith 2011) was that of Kuchah Kuchah, a teacher in a very large primary school class in Cameroon and subsequently inspector in the Cameroonian Ministry of Education, who came to my university for masters and doctoral level studies and with whom I’ve been collaborating a lot in the area of teaching in difficult circumstances.

I’ve also been encouraging teachers in workshops to share their own success stories in difficult circumstances, since the positive experiences they share may be more appropriate than ideas from the outside. If teachers are facing difficulties it’s good to ask “Does anyone else teaching in the same kind of context have any possible solutions for this?” This is one way of making up for the very little research available for such teachers. It can form the basis for what Kuchah and I have recently been terming an “enhancement approach” (cf. Smith, Padwad & Bullock 2017), as opposed to a more prevalent deficit perspective which focuses attention on what teachers *cannot* do vis-à-vis supposed “ideal” conditions in better-resourced contexts.

5.5 Valuing teacher associations

Participation in teacher associations has been very important for me in my own career, and latterly I've been doing work which celebrates their value, researching about them (e.g. Rixon & Smith 2016) and/or encouraging research within them. In recent work (Smith & Kuchah 2016, Kuchah & Smith 2018), we have been suggesting on the basis of experience in Cameroon that teacher associations can support teachers to do research and can identify salient issues, formulate research questions and initiate projects which are important for teachers themselves.

In addressing questions of appropriate methodology and development of teacher autonomy, teacher associations may have an important role to play. Perhaps they can fulfil this role more effectively even than universities: universities are not necessarily set up to support teachers from the bottom up whereas this is potentially teacher associations' major role.

5.6 Teacher-research (for difficult circumstances)

Finally, a lot of my energies in the past few years have been devoted, with Paula Rebolledo, to developing a way for teachers to do action research which is not an extra burden in already difficult circumstances and which they perceive, instead, as a useful means to confront and deal with the issues they are facing. The "Exploratory Action Research" approach developed for secondary school teachers in Chile (and based originally on my earlier teacher education work: cf. 5.2 above; also, Smith 2015) has been taken up in other countries too, including Peru, India and Nepal (cf. Rebolledo, Smith & Bullock 2016; Smith & Rebolledo 2018). Evaluative research we have begun to carry out into this approach (e.g. Smith, Connelly & Rebolledo 2014) has been showing that teachers do find positive value in Exploratory Action Research and perceive it as an effective way to develop appropriate methodology for difficult circumstances, with positive outcomes including enhanced relationships with students and an enhanced sense of agency on the part of teachers.

6 Show how the question(s) might shape foreign language research.

I don't have very much to say on the issue of how my grand questions might shape foreign language research in the future. It seems to me personally that these are major "questions of the age" we've been living through, given the decentring of ELT that's been going on and that I've been trying to help promote. It is for others to take them forward in their own ways, while my own

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task has been and still is to catalyse this process to the extent that I can, to try to get more people, in particular teachers in marginalized contexts, informed and involved in this process.

I would, however, like to end with some thoughts from my experience regarding how research can be taken forward more generally in these areas. As I've been emphasizing throughout this chapter, what I think we need much more of is research *for* ELT practitioners – closer to practitioners' concerns than is normal. I hope I've shown how my own research has related to my own practice as a teacher and teacher educator in Japan and the UK, and to the concerns of teachers I've been working with. My belief is that it is important to consider the wider purpose / value of one's research and attempt to ensure it is grounded in teachers' / learners' concerns and/or perspectives at all stages. This is why, in place of the received notion of “Applied Linguistics”, I have begun to favour the designation “ELT research” for the field in which I'm working.

“ELT research” was first defined (in a 2009–13 British Council project I coordinated) as referring to “any research whose data and/or findings relate directly to the teaching, learning or assessment of English as a Foreign, Second or Additional Language in the UK or any other context” (Rixon & Smith 2010: 3). This was one step in the direction of asserting the need for research to be *relevant* to practitioners. What we may need more of, though, is research which attempts to build a focus on practitioners' concerns into all stages, not just dissemination, in other words which actually *involves* learners and teachers in research (cf. Smith, Kuchah & Lamb 2018). From this perspective, “ELT research” could be (re)defined more radically as research which is planned, carried out and / or disseminated with the (active and equal) engagement of ELT practitioners, for example:

- in formulating research issues and questions;
- in planning data collection approach;
- in analysing data;
- in interpreting the findings;
- in sharing the research.

This could occur, for example, in the context of ...

- researcher–teacher collaborations;
- university / training college –school partnerships;
- teacher association research;
- encouragement of teacher-research via existing and new networks.

While I feel that this could offer a promising new, relatively devolved framework for research in the field of ELT, in my own work I have as yet only managed to explore some of these possibilities and establish some facilitating conditions: inevitably, it is for other teachers, researchers, teacher-researchers and researcher-teachers to judge their appropriateness, and the relevance of the questions and answers I have been describing, in their own autonomous fashion!

7 Conclusion

One of the teachers I worked with in Chile shared with us an important insight he had gained from his practitioner research: “We need powerful questions to get powerful answers”. I believe he is quite right. In this chapter I’ve had the opportunity to step back and reflect on what I’ve been doing in my career, and to draw some apparently disparate threads together, at least in my own mind. I’m happy with the “power” of the underlying (not really “overarching”) questions I’ve uncovered and which I was not previously so consciously aware of – “How can English teachers develop appropriate methodology? How can they have autonomy?”

In fact, in more general terms, I’ve come to realize that, paradoxically, there exist answers in our field to which the questions have not yet been fully uncovered. More specifically, I believe there are many valuable ideas, *in the experiences of teachers* which are not being shared with other teachers around the world simply because they are considered to be of too little interest by academics and theorists with power in the field of language education. The field seems top-heavy with abstract theory, jargon and micro-concerns of little evident value to the majority of teachers. There is far too little investigation, still, which departs from and builds on the lived experiences of teachers of English in difficult circumstances in public education systems around the world. I have tried to document and highlight the importance of some of these experiences but much more remains to be done.

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