

Third International Conference on Teaching English as a Foreign Language
Research in Action / Research for Action
26th & 27th November 2010– FCSH/UNL

The Third International Conference on “Teaching English as a Foreign Language” took place in Lisbon at *Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas da Universidade Nova de Lisboa* on 26th and 27th November 2010 and aimed to reach Portuguese teachers of English in the teaching career groups 110, 220 and 330 (this last one being the group which I belong to). The conference was target therefore for those who work and are interested in Teaching English from Primary to Secondary and Higher levels of Education as a mean to convey information as well as formation, so I would say that, once again, it achieved and surpassed its main aim.

The main topic of the Conference this year was: RESEARCH IN ACTION, RESEARCH FOR ACTION IN ELT

Sub-topics:

- Teacher education in practice
- Learner-centred language education
- Intercultural education
- Language and discourse

The Conference was intended to disseminate completed research or research in progress and to promote debate and reflection on issues such as: priorities for research in foreign language education; effective research methods and research paradigms.

The information on the event was posted online at:

<http://www.fcsch.unl.pt/docentes/cceia/conferencias/TEFL3-2010> and there are also available some PowerPoint presentations (and this year we have a lot more to explore than the previous year) used at the conference and pictures of the speakers which are always great to remember the speakers. Another great advantage was the inclusion of the sites given by the speakers and authors mentioned.

The Committee of “The 3rd International Conference on “Teaching English as a Foreign Language” was organized by:

- Prof. Doutor Carlos Ceia (Convener)
- Prof^a Doutora Ana Matos

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- Prof^a Doutora Ana Frankenberg-Garcia
- Dr^a Vanessa Boutefeu
- Dr^a Allyson Roberts

- Dr. David Hardisty
- Dr. Dave Rowlands

As Keynote Speakers we had:

- **Dick Allwright** - Professor in Applied Linguistics at Lancaster University
- **Karen Risager** - Professor in Cultural Encounters, Roskilde Universitet (Denmark)
- **Patrick Hanks** - Visiting Professor, Institute of Formal and Applied Linguistics, Charles University in Prague
- **Judith Hanks** - Senior Teaching Fellow at The Language Centre, University of Leeds

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) means teaching English to people who don't use it as a first language or as dominant language and in most cases it is seldom used in everyday life. Students usually learn it in their own country either at school or language schools and their teachers may be either native or non-native speakers of English.

As a teacher I am always eager to learn, to listen and to discuss teaching and learning new techniques so I can then share them with other teachers and with my students. This particular Conference enriched my knowledge in many ways: listen to fluent English, become aware of new trends and new approaches and share information with other teachers.

This year, I am glad we had the workshops where teachers of all levels had the opportunity to share and promote their activities to an audience beyond their classrooms. With these activities we get motivated, we learn and by all means we change. We feel enriched by the end of the day and we go home with the desire of putting the things we have learnt into action. It is an exhausting weekend (plus

Saturday), however it is extremely rewarding. Teachers get formation and have the possibility to reflect and refresh once again their minds by reading the presentations.

The conference TEFL had as subtitle Research in Action/ Research for Action and discussed some trends and concerns in global terms. They were all extremely good presentations and it very hard and difficult to choose three of them to talk about. From my teaching experience, I will choose those that I think are more adequate to the levels I teach and are motivating to my students.

- Plenary talk: Dick Allwright (Lancaster) - Professor in Applied Linguistics at Lancaster University - "Making Practitioner Research fully inclusive through Exploratory Practice"

Professor Dick Allwright began and ended the 3rd International Conference by showing us all that it is possible to be a fully inclusive practitioner in an environment where the language could be a barrier.

The interaction shown between children/learners/teachers/parents in Rio de Janeiro was extremely grandiose and of course of great value.

Allwright made us think, once again, that teachers should be good as learners as well as teachers. The teacher is not the only practitioner in the classroom, learners are also practitioners and they love when teachers listen to them.

The learners may not want to become language professionals, but teachers want them to become good language practitioners. And we may ask, why? So that their learning can continue long after they have had all the teaching schools can offer.

In other words, we can then say that we have practitioners of teaching and practitioners of learning.

Allwright, however mentioned that most practitioner research treats only the teacher as practitioner, leaving the learner-practitioner out of the picture, except perhaps as the object of the research.

This made me think and question about some of the things that I am trying to do with some of my students. For example, one of the things I did was using the Etwinning / Twinspace to make a cross cultural exchange with twenty four European

schools and the students/learners were obviously the centre of the project. Each student worked with one of the twenty four schools.

As we have seen in Rio, my students were also eager to show and share what they've learned with their European partners as well as showing their work to their classmates, teachers and parents. Was the work my students and I have done considered also Exploratory Practice Research?

I believe that teacher/ learner practitioners can walk side by side and in both cases learn from each other's experiences.

From here I move on to Carolyn Leslie's speech on "Motivating Teenage Learners" as I think that Allwright and Leslie's talk are truthfully correlated. In both cases the aim is to increase the levels of success by motivating learners. My question is: how can we motivate teenagers in a classroom when they are all so different from each other? This is when the teacher, as a practitioner, steps forward to set strategies and goals of different kinds in order to attain the students' involvement and to encourage them to become more autonomous learners and self confidence in using the language. Leslie pointed out that to be effective these goals must be very specific.

Allwright suggests an action research project inside the classroom as a way to encourage students to improve and use English in class, with questions such as "classroom problems" or "daily problems". Allwright also recommended "exchanging letters within the school" writing about the things going on in class. The idea is to help learners to solve their problems and make them feel they are able to learn as anyone else, also that they can trust the teacher and the class.

Sheila Branningan, from the British Council, also agrees with the idea that to motivate the students we need to research the learner's wants and needs: "What do learners want and need to do with the language?"

The aim of the speeches is: Motivating Teenage Learners.

Education is communication. Today we communicate in a wider range of formats. New skills are demanded for the effective communication according to the social claims. Therefore, I also liked the guidance of David Hardisty through Google in the workshop. So simple and, yet, so meaningful. Even finding useful information requires

skill and judgement. Google Trends, for example, can provide statistical information and we can use it in a creative way. The Web is a useful collection of information and materials that may be a stimulus for writing and speaking practice as well as to raise discussion.

The numerous technology-enhanced applications used in EFL contexts have become very popular learning tools as they engage students in authentic and collaborative tasks.

E-learning approaches where learners can practise communication offer more opportunities to contact with a wide variety of cultures to exchange and collaborate. It can enhance creativity and encourages breaking cultural stereotypes.

The conference promoted a space for dialogue and gathered at the same time teachers from several places (like public or private schools) and covering several levels, from Primary to University level, thus reassuring that we are not working aside but we can learn collaboratively by sharing and learning with others.

Considering the need for adjustment in a world in continuous change where global is far from being the same for everyone, but was adapted to “local” situations, serving and self-preserving identities, it is necessary to share and learn new theories, new practices and methodologies in order to embrace the linguistic and technological diversity. Words are lively, not static, language is gaining new words, changing and evolving everyday and once again we have “action” going on. How can we get our students also in “Action”? By getting appropriate materials, ideas that engage them in the progress that they are meant and develop the EFL as an important tool for their daily life and future.

Therefore those who continue to search, those who embrace change, those who are eager to learn, those who refuse to stay still have already realized that their world is much “bigger” and “richer”.

Research in Action /Research for Action opened my eyes and made me think once again that as a teacher I have all the tools I need to make my students walk by themselves, to make them feel confident in this world of many changes “Actions lie louder than words.” ***Carolyn Wells***