



L-Università
ta' Malta

A continuum of participation

Exploring different levels of
participant involvement in (PhD)
research projects

Jason Anderson

jason.anderson@warwick.ac.uk

International Doctoral Summer School

University of Malta



WARWICK

APPLIED LINGUISTICS

Overview

1. Defining 'participants'
2. The wisdom of participants (task)
3. Participatory ladders
4. A possible continuum
5. Discussing involvement (task)
6. Case study: My PhD study
7. Critical caution
8. References and Q&A



Participants

1. (strict definition) those we collect data from/with in our research (also 'informants', 'subjects') (BAAL, 2016)
2. (peripheral participants) other individuals and stakeholders around a study (e.g., access gatekeepers, facilitators, data collectors, etc.).

Make a list of these for your project.

The wisdom of participants

Task

Consider what knowledge participants may have that may be useful to your study beyond them as a source of 'data':

1. What might they know about things related to the study that you don't know (e.g., contextual factors, historical factors, social factors)?
2. What other areas of their cognition/psychology may be important for data collection (e.g., attitudes, schema, awareness, motivation, etc.)?

Participatory research: What is it?

- Typical definition (community development literature):
 - “participatory research focuses on a process of sequential reflection and action, carried out **with** and **by** local people rather than **on** them. Local knowledge and perspectives are not only acknowledged but form the basis for research and planning” (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995, p. 1667, emphasis added)
- Many sources tend to conflate participation and action (e.g., Finn, 1994; Thiollent, 2011).
- But these can be usefully separated:
 - “participatory research... shifts the emphasis from action and change to collaborative research activities” (Bergold & Thomas, 2012, p. 195; also Hansen et al., 2001).
- **Does ‘participation’ have to be an all or nothing affair?**

Ladders/Hierarchies of participation

Arnstein's was first
(1969, p. 217)

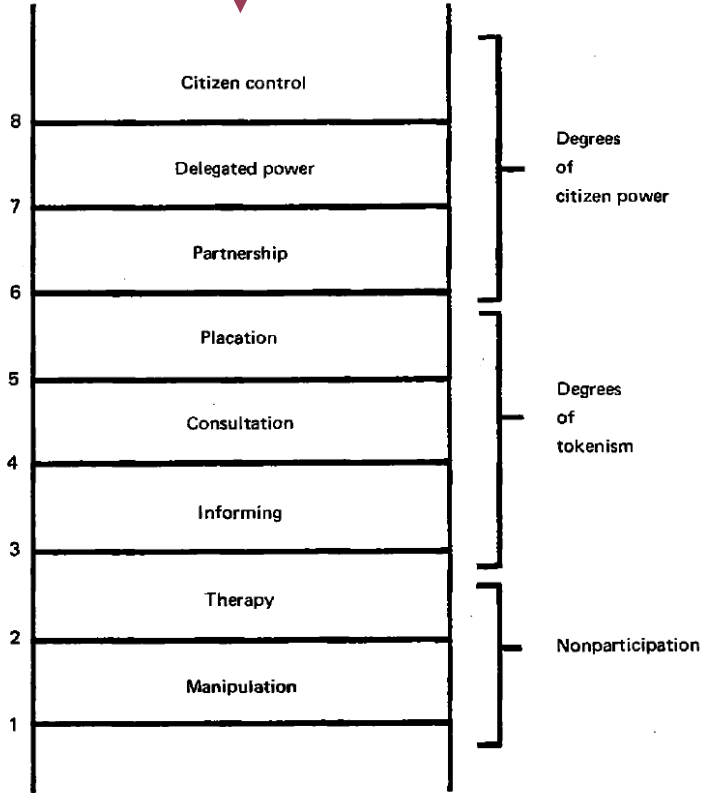
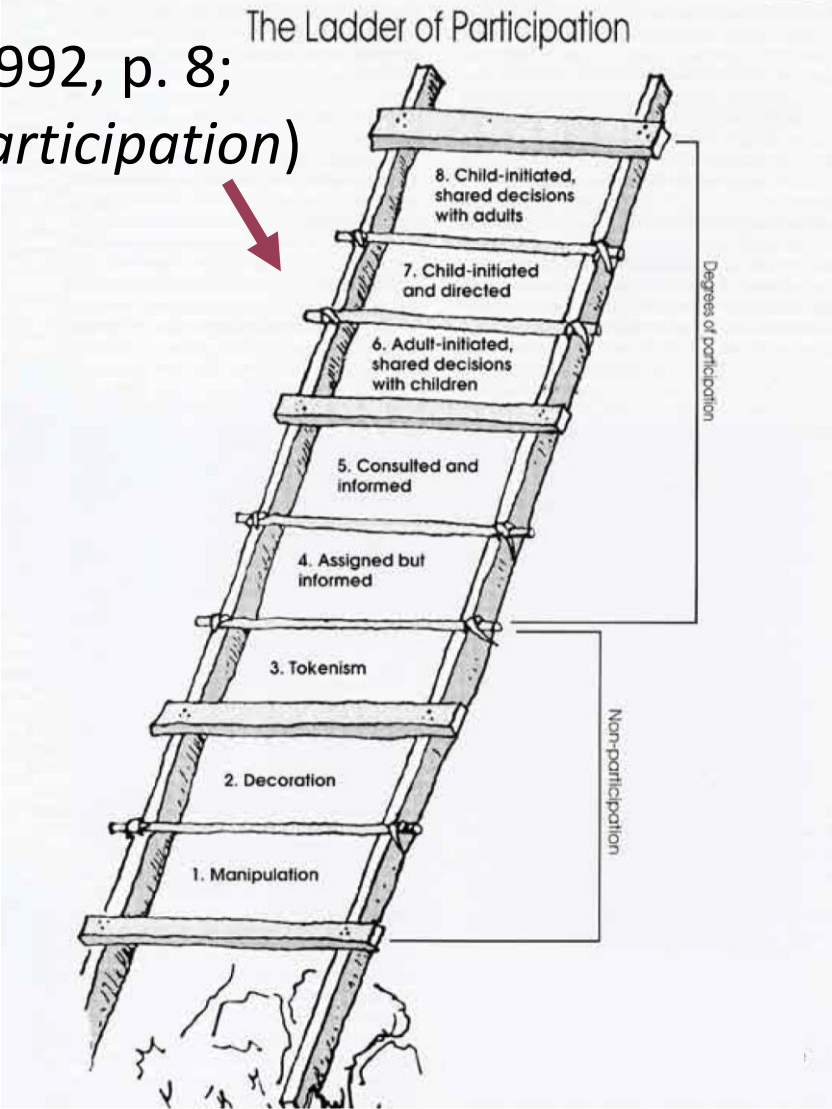


FIGURE 2 Eight Rungs on a Ladder of Citizen Participation

Hart (1992, p. 8;
child participation)



Pretty (1995,
p. 1252; *display reversed*)



7. Self-mobilization
6. Interactive participation
5. Functional participation
4. Participation for material incentives
3. Participation by consultation
2. Passive participation
1. Manipulative participation

How much participation makes a study ‘participatory’?

- Sources (e.g., Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Pretty, 1995; Thiollent, 2011) largely agree that for a study to be considered participatory:
 - a) both sides (participant[s] and researcher) must benefit from the research process;
 - b) there needs to be meaningful interaction at the study design stage, when...
“the most important distinctions centre on how and by whom is the research question formulated and by and for whom are research findings used” (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995, p. 1668).
- These criteria can be met through “functional participation”.
- A working definition of participatory research:
Participatory research involves key stakeholders and researchers working together to varying degrees in order to identify and pursue outcomes that are useful for all parties.

Functional participation

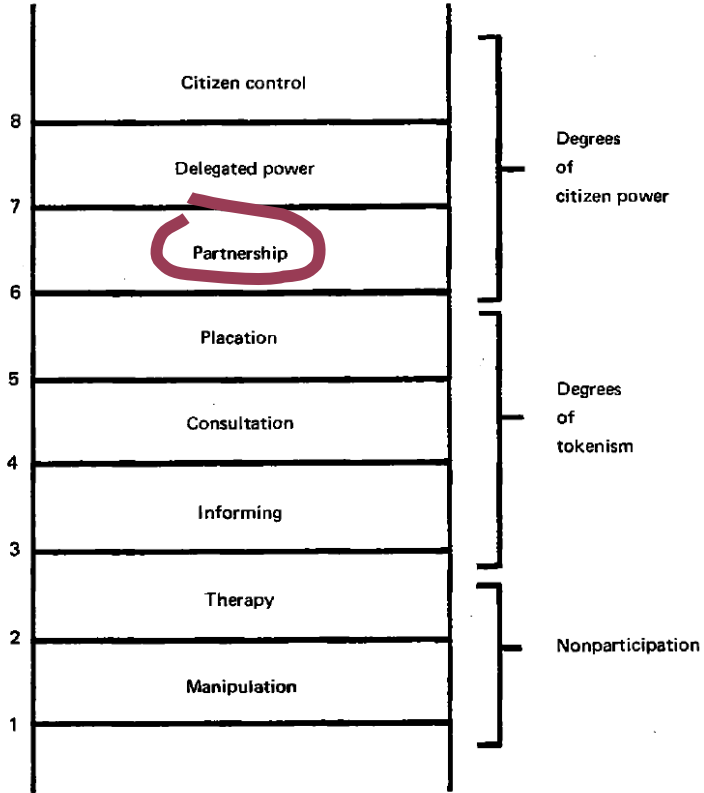
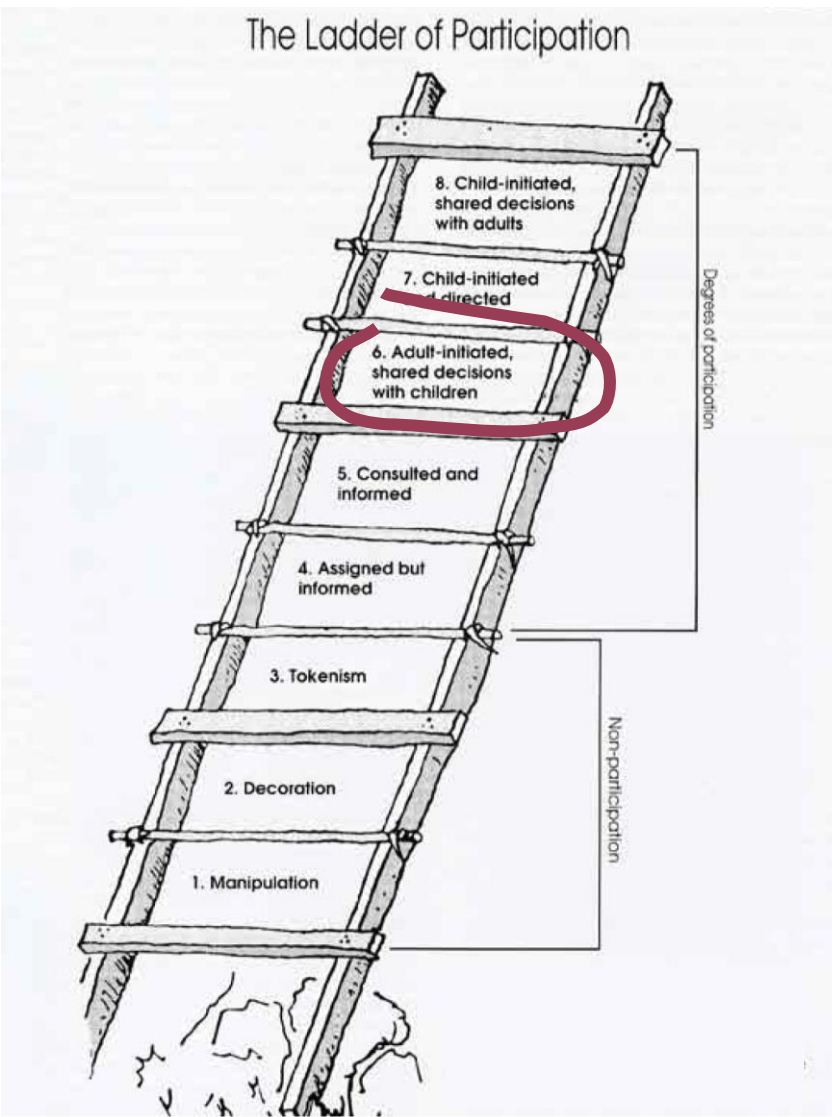


FIGURE 2 *Eight Rungs on a Ladder of Citizen Participation*



7. Self-mobilization
6. Interactive participation
5. Functional participation
4. Participation for material incentives
3. Participation by consultation
2. Passive participation
1. Manipulative participation

Examples of functional participation

- **Expanding upon participant validation / member checking:** Share findings with participants at several stages to get feedback - including on (their) coded data, during later stages of analysis (e.g., comparison) and after incorporated into the thesis (i.e., draft proof-reading).
- **Planning (a stage of) the study together:** Inviting (selected/potential) participants to a planning meeting in which they learn about the study (e.g., aims, research questions, design, timetable). They are then given the chance to discuss and potentially influence any or all of these, and to propose additional outcomes, followed by negotiation and attempt at consensus.

Consultation

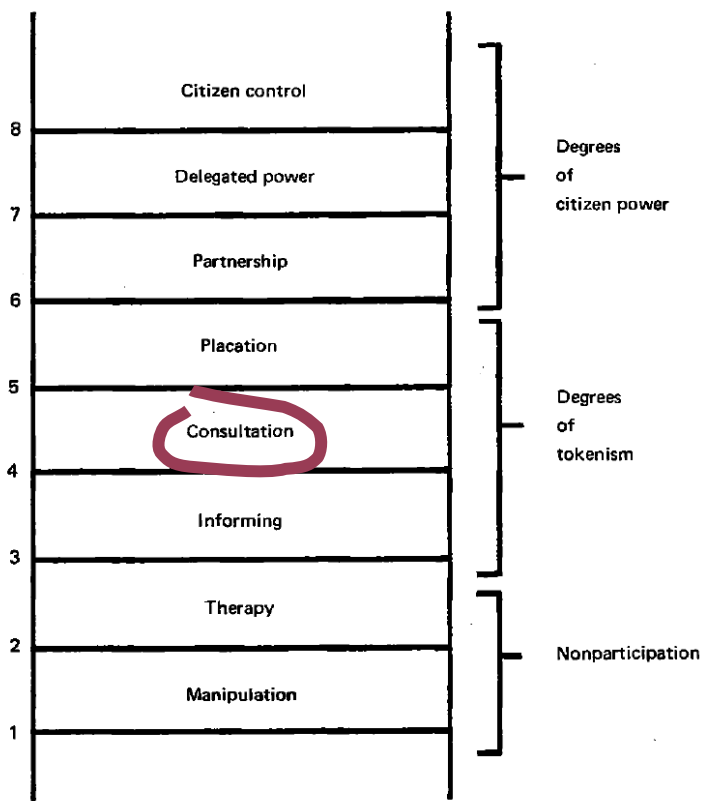
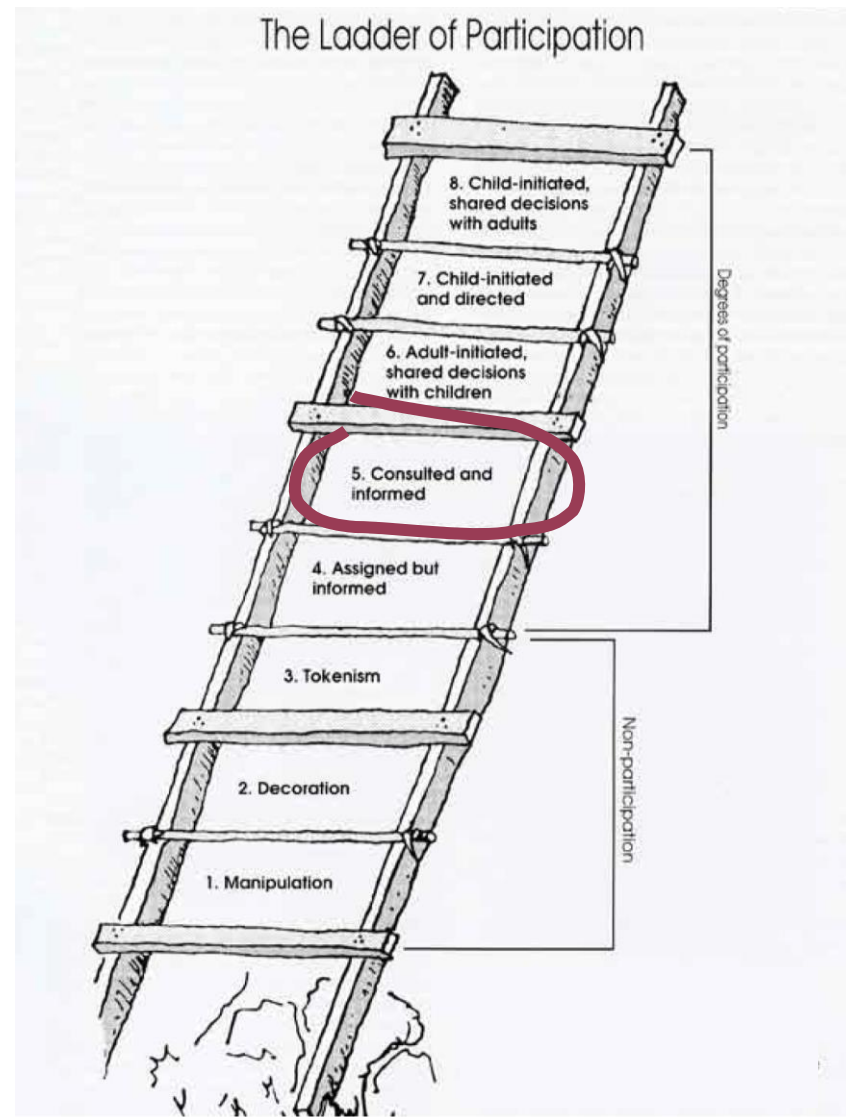


FIGURE 2 *Eight Rungs on a Ladder of Citizen Participation*



7. Self-mobilization
6. Interactive participation
5. Functional participation
4. Participation for material incentives
3. Participation by consultation
2. Passive participation
1. Manipulative participation

Example of consultation in survey research

33. Teaching should always build on students' prior knowledge.

Disagree	37	21.9
Disagree strongly	21	12.4
Agree strongly	77	45.6
Agree	62	36.7
Neither agree nor disagree	9	5.3
Disagree	18	10.7
Disagree strongly	2	1.2

15 responses received

Comments for Section D

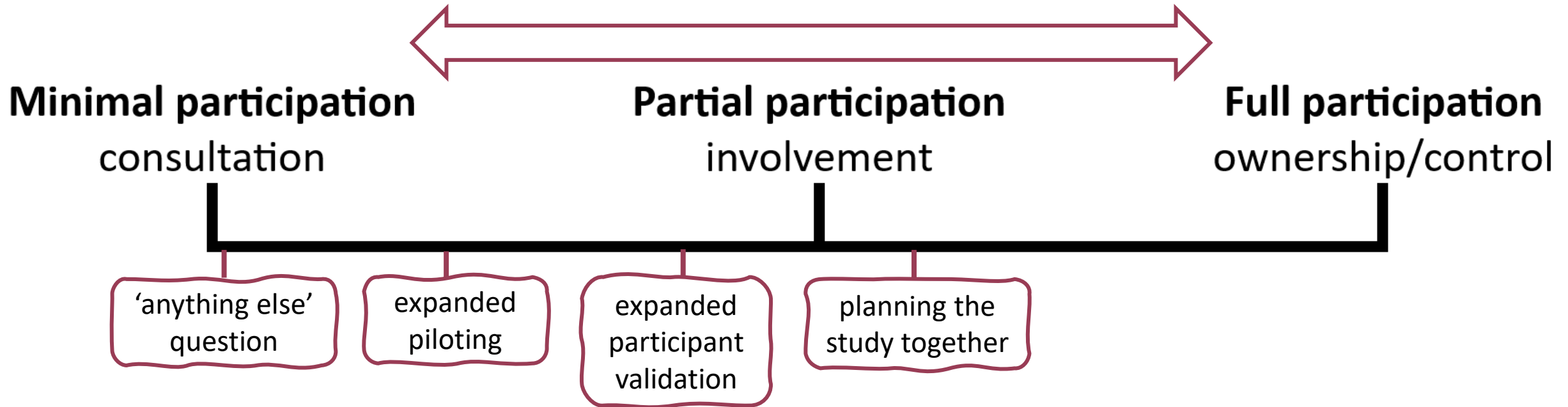
E. Anything else?

The aim of this survey is to better understand how teachers of English in India do or don't make use of other languages in the English language teaching and learning process. Before you finish the survey, is there anything else you would like to tell us about this issue?

56 responses received

- From Anderson & Lightfoot (2021)

A possible continuum?



By seeing participation as a continuum (rather than a ladder):

- We identify a wider range of opportunities for participant involvement.
- We avoid assuming that more participation is always better.
- We can 'mix-and-match' activities from along the continuum if appropriate.

Benefits and dangers of functional/minimal participation

Advantages

1. Greater equity: power is (more) shared
2. Sense of shared purpose
3. Facilitates data collection and analysis
4. Potential to increase usefulness and relevance
5. Can lead to other outputs/outcomes of relevance

Dangers

1. Tokenism or manipulation (Arnstein, 1969)
2. Misperceptions relating to degree of participation/control
3. Impact on researcher 'objectivity'
4. What happens if participants don't like the findings?
5. Conflicting goals/interests

Others?

Discussing 'involvement'

Task

Involvement means going beyond direct 'use' for data collection, considering ways that participants might contribute...

1. ...before official data collection begins
2. ...during data collection
3. ...after data collection is completed

Thinking about your PhD study (or any research project you're involved in), think of a few ways that you could (or could have) involved participants more – negotiation, functional, transformational?

4. How it could be(come) more participatory



Ethnography



1



Anonymous 22d



Collaborative writing of discussion and findings using GoogleDocs and other live sharing tools



Add comment

Narrative inquiry



2



Anonymous 22d



Let the participants' stories lead the interview



Anonymous 22d



self-reflection through journaling



Add comment

Survey



2



Anonymous 22d



Maybe include more open-ended questions



Anonymous 22d



Pre-stage: participants joining the survey design



Add comment

Conversation analysis



2



Anonymous 22d



It could function in a research proposes - participants confirm manner. For example, the recording can be collected on the first day of the week, and then at the end of the week, the researchers can ask the participants (who might be uninformed of the CA conventions) to confirm and/or provide possible justifications for what they were saying ("Hmm at that time I believe I wanted to say..."). This should be done as early as possible as their memories of the conversational situation are still fresh.



Anonymous 22d



If all participants are CA-informed, this could even be a fully participatory one. Everybody can arrange a meeting where researchers-participants sit and analyse the data together.



Examples
from prior
workshop

My PhD

Eight expert Indian teachers of English:
A participatory comparative case study of teacher expertise in the Global South
(Anderson, 2021, 2023a, 2023b)



Phase	PhD study	Participatory element
Preparatory phase ↓	Conducted exploratory research with teachers in a relevant community (an Indian teacher association) to investigate their understandings of teacher quality.	
1. Theorising expertise ↓	Developed theory and definition of teacher expertise. Appropriate criteria for recruiting participants for the main study were identified.	Equitable approach to participant recruitment was adopted.
2. Recruitment of participants ↓	Participants were recruited through a call for expressions of interest via the Indian teacher association used in the preparatory phase, through self-evaluation of a range of criteria.	
3. Planning of study and outputs ↓	One-day meeting was conducted with participants to plan the study (incl. study focus, research questions, approach, outputs, participant welfare).	Agreed on outcomes of interest to all participants (incl. co-authored book).
4. Data collection ↓	Data collection tools were tailored to agreed focus. Initial pilot study led to minor modifications. Visits to remaining participants went largely to plan.	
5. Data analysis and writing ↓	Data analysis for individual cases was conducted, including transcription, coding and analysis of data to build individual case descriptions.	Participants wrote chapters for co-authored book.
6. Comparative analysis and review ↓	Cross-case comparison was conducted. Participant validation was conducted carefully over two phases.	Peer-review of each other's chapters.
7. Completion	Thesis completed.	Book published.

Participants waived the right to anonymity after participant validation. Instead, they wanted to be recognised and celebrated.

Figure from Anderson, 2023b. Used with permission.

Participant outputs

- Own publications (and learning)
- (Prathikantam, 2021)



Jason Anderson, a researcher at Warwick University in the United Kingdom, interacting with students of ZPHS Jangapally

Peer Observation: A Self-Reflective Tool

Inviting subject experts into the classroom and obtaining constructive feedback is key to professional development. For this issue of Edusure, Vinayadharaju, School Assistant, English, ZPHS Jangapally, Karimnagar District writes about his interactions with Dr. Jason Anderson, a researcher at the University of Warwick, United Kingdom.

Dr. Anderson is currently working on a project, "Effective Teachers in India", in collaboration with Ainet India, Association of English Teachers. When I came to know about his research topic, I was on my toes to be part of his study on English language teaching and submitted an application when he was on the lookout for interested teachers to join his research. I cleared the online interview and was among ten teachers selected across India.

He visited India and convened a meeting in Hyderabad to brief us on the project details and schedule. His fieldwork at our school was conducted over a month starting on 12 June, 2020, during which he observed and recorded classroom teaching and interacted with stu-

dents, parents, the headmaster, and the teaching staff. He also interviewed me, asking questions about my life, in addition to daily post-lesson interviews. His presence in our school motivated teachers to improve their teaching standards, and students to better their English-speaking skills.

At first, students used to stare at him when he arrived in class, camera in hand, but they got used to his presence quickly. The children of Class 6 were most eager, engaging him in conversation whenever he was free. I saw that they were able to speak grammatical English in a carefree manner, helped in no small measure by Dr. Anderson, who deliberately slowed down his speech to make sure they followed. More students started approaching him with little hesitation and learnt about British culture and their educational system during their lengthy chats. His interactive approach created an environment in which the students and teachers started to converse in English with each other readily.

Dr. Anderson sat in on classes to observe the instructors' teaching

styles. He gave us feedback and suggestions for improvement. His involvement proved to me that peer observation is one of the best ways to achieve professional development in education. Since then, our teachers have made it a point to observe each other's lessons and give feedback.

Before his visit, I had some conflicting opinions on student-teacher interactions. I have experienced a paradigm shift in my perceptions about the use of proper language and sentence form since his visit, as I now realize that the fundamental purpose of language is to communicate and that the emphasis should be on meaning rather than rules. I also learned that involving students in classroom discourse, rather than simply presenting them with information through lectures yields better results. Meaningful interaction is critical in language acquisition. Students' voices must be heard and amplified so that they become self-sufficient learners.

Dr. Anderson had videotaped practically all of my classes, around 28 of them. For me, these recordings are a treasure trove as they allow me

to observe myself as a teacher and make improvements in my methods. I intend to write a paper on my lessons in which I will emphasize the use of my mother tongue when instructing students. On reviewing recordings of my classes, I realized that using one's native tongue as a means of communication allowed for seamless conversation between all parties involved. In addition to this, Dr. Anderson's constructive suggestions encouraged collaboration, group work, behaviour management, lesson planning, assignments, and classroom management. Not only has this helped me convey my ideas better, but also be self-reflective about my teaching habits.

Here are some of the activities which Dr. Anderson witnessed in my classroom:

[Note: These exercises are not a part of his research. They are regular and frequent classroom practices in my method of instruction.]

Our Class 9 students were asked to make a project by interviewing Dr. Anderson. Students were divided into groups and each group assigned

Participant outputs

- Shared presentations

Four breakout rooms: Four developmental pathways

Which of the following would you like to learn more about?

- Breakout Room 1 – Doing and mentoring teacher action research **Manjusha and Vinay**
- Breakout Room 2 – Getting involved in teacher associations **Dipika and Nurjahan**
- Breakout Room 3 – Working as a district/state teacher trainer **Gajanan and Shekhar**
- Breakout Room 4 – Participating in overseas scholarship opportunities **Kuheli and Raju**
- Please choose your room.
- Each presentation will last 20 minutes, including questions.

Participants in breakout rooms:

- Manjusha Sagolikar
- Vinaydhar Raju
- Deepika Gode
- Nurjahan Naik
- Gajanan Tayade
- Shekhar Khomne
- Kuheli Mukherjee
- Raju Lingala

Teacher connect webinars: Turning experience into expertise

British Council India
140K subscribers

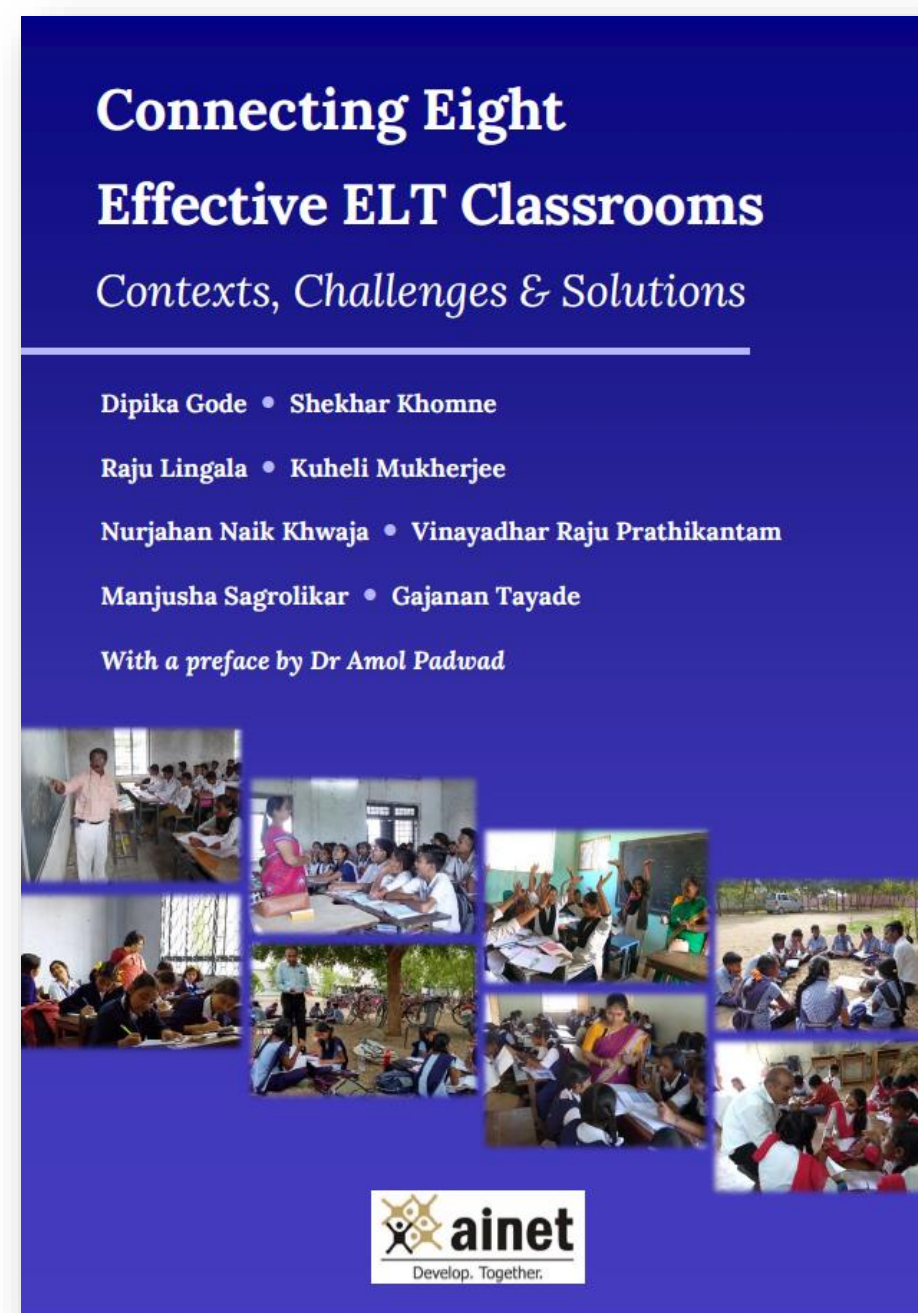
1.5K views 9 months ago Teacher connect webinars

In this webinar, the lead presenter, Dr Jason Anderson, presented findings from his participatory research project involving eight expert teachers of English, all of whom work in government secondary schools in India.

Show more

Participant outputs

- Participants' book (Gode et al., 2021)





1. Exploration and change in the classroom

Nurjahan Naik Khwaja

1. My context and challenges

Teaching is considered as one of the noblest professions on the globe and I feel privileged to be a teacher. I teach in a coastal part of Maharashtra. My school is a government-aided school running classes from standard 1 to 12. Being a highly-reputed school, we have students from almost all sectors of society. Being located in a semi-urban area, our students range from 1,200-1,300 in number and come from fishing communities, farming backgrounds, salaried families, local business families and even from migrating labourers. I teach classes 5, 8, 9 and 10. My students are mostly in the lower streams. Besides being a teacher at secondary level, I work as a teacher trainer also.

I have been working in my present school for the past nine years. The biggest challenge I face is dealing with the average and below average learners for consecutive years with limited resources and little support from the parents. The classes I teach are mostly mixed ability classes where the number of average and

– 1 –

Nurjahan Naik Khwaja

activity. If the language I use is too difficult for the students, I use their mother tongue to explain it. So, a balanced combination of English along with mother tongue works well for my class. Along with regular teaching, there are many occasions in the lesson where we share a good laugh. Using their mother tongue here retains their attention and makes the lesson joyful.

Adding fun to the class

A lesson becomes interesting when it has some fun elements and language games cannot be any exception to this. I often incorporate them into my lessons as ice-breaking activities at the beginning of the academic year. After I have taught vocabulary, I use language games for revising it. Whether it's practising grammar concepts, assessing the learnt content, or utilizing learners' spare time, language games are of great help. Along with acquiring knowledge, learners find the lessons enjoyable. 'Back to the board' and 'Slap the board' (see Figure 1) are two such popular games among my learners which have been adapted by other teachers as well.



Figure 1. Students play 'Slap the board' to revise vocabulary.

My idea of a democratic class

Many a times, I consider students' opinion on their preferred way of working. Promoting autonomy in classwork is necessary for me because it makes the students feel that they are an important part of the lesson and it advocates democracy as well. As they are going to be responsible citizens of tomorrow, this prepares them for future life as well. Often while assigning them homework, I ask the students what homework they would like to have or they can do on the lessons learnt.

– 6 –



2. Creating a learning community in the school

Raju Lingala

1. My context and challenges

My school is a small Zilla Parishad High School in rural Telangana located 150 kilometres from our state capital, Hyderabad. It is a government school running classes from standard 6 to 10. It was started as an upper primary school in the 1960s and upgraded to high school in 1997. It serves the population of a small village where most of the upper class and middle class students go to school in a nearby major village. All of the students of our school belong to marginalised communities. I feel it's important to share that all of our students (except one) are disadvantaged, coming from scheduled castes and backward castes. Among them, 20% are orphans or semi-orphans. Our school has two media of instructions: Telugu and English.

– 12 –

Raju Lingala

My choice of using L1 depends on the context. For example, I use L1 very often when teaching Telugu-medium students, more than English-medium students. I follow immersion and integration approaches while teaching English. I make use of opportunities where my students use English and I encourage them to expose themselves to English wherever and whenever possible. Most of the time I deliberately try to integrate all the four basic skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) of English. I strongly support and use the bilingual method and blended learning in my classroom.

Curriculum coverage and planning

Curriculum helps me with what I have to teach and complete in an academic year. In my initial years of teaching I thought the textbook is the Bible for the classroom, but now I am using authentic materials to support a particular topic from the textbook. I always try to make my classroom transaction as lively as possible using different materials (see Figure 1), and connect that particular lesson to the immediate society. I teach English as a language to learn and use it as a subject to complete the syllabus and prepare my students for the examinations. I plan my lessons keeping these things in mind. For large classes I use groups and for smaller classes I'm using pairs. We learn from one another. Recently I started giving importance to 21st-century skills and the sustainable development goals of the United Nations.

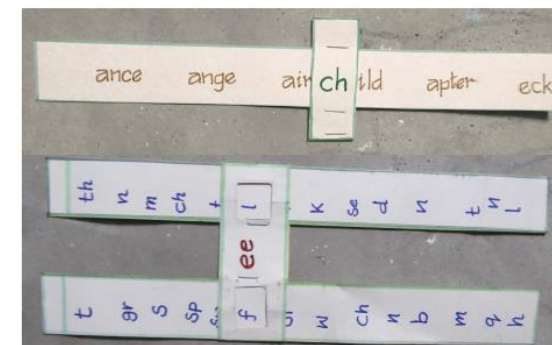


Figure 1. Teaching-learning materials for English literacy development.

– 16 –



3. Learning within our natural surroundings

Manjusha Sagrolkar

1. My context and challenges

In my school I face many challenges while working with students. I have been working in a government girls' secondary school in a small rural town in Maharashtra since 1994. Twenty years I had larger classes, including higher secondary grades. Students enrol at the school from remote places where they do household chores, work in their fields or other's fields, from the beginning of the monsoon and during production and cultivation time. During harvesting also they support farmers and earn with their parents. This is the seasonal work when parents won't allow girls to attend schools. This is the earning period for them, a valuable time for their yearly saving. Amongst all these challenges of life, my students complete assignments, study and score more. Here, summer is a hard time for them. My village students have to go in search of water barefoot and carry heavy pots on their heads.

– 19 –

Manjusha Sagrolkar

for exams? What type of activities I need to plan? Which ELT materials they need? They taught me. Teaching is not a one-way process, it is a continuous interaction with the ideas of students.

3. My advice for colleagues with similar challenges

Here I have a few natural flavours for novice teachers so that they can add a 'pinch' to their teaching routine. I promise, your learners will love these ideas!

1. 'P' for planning

This is your own recipe of the upcoming academic year. It's your own creation. You decide the ingredients, what to add, what to omit, how to cook, how to process, how much essence you need to spread the aroma. It's all in your hands. You are the master cook of the year.

You need this at each stage. This means asking yourself: what will your students do in their daily routine? What will they learn by the end of week? How can your learners reflect upon their learning at the month end? How can you be sure about your student's learning? You ask these questions about your plan, then you can add this 'P' flavour for taste.

In the beginning of the academic year, teachers need to focus on planning. How much time we need to spend per day? And how many weeks we need to connect previous knowledge with the current syllabus? This saves some classroom time for conducting warmers or other pre-learning activities. Teachers can give students a few activities related with reading comprehension or grammar, as a part of project work. Make a list of projects at the start of the year when school begins. Observe students' performance and then distribute the work in groups. Students can share the work and give responsibility to other group members.

2. 'P' for purpose

This flavour helps you to keep yourself on the right track. It makes your dish nutritious. Your purpose will help your students to keep their learning purpose in front of their eyes. They will come to know what they need to learn and how much time they need to spend on it, the purpose of a lesson and the purpose of your planned activities. Your learners can help you decide what they need, in which areas you need to focus. Just keep them observing and interacting with a continuous flow of

– 24 –



4. Making learning meaningful

Vinayadhar Raju Prathikantam

1. My context and challenges

I work in a rural government secondary school run by the Telangana state government. The media of instruction are Telugu and English. Most of my students are from economically disadvantaged social groups. Their parents are illiterate and depend on farming for income. My school is located at a crossroads, from where it is accessible to seven villages so students from different villages come to our school every year. Though my students are travelling from far away villages, they are very regular in attendance and very enthusiastic learners. I teach class 6, 7, 9 and 10. The average class size is around 40.

The first challenge is that our classroom space is small so we are facing problems while working on collaborative tasks and groupwork. Most of the time we are using the space available outside to work in groups or sometime students will sit on the floor to discuss activities (see Figure 1).

— 26 —

The second challenge we are facing is support to integrate technology into our classrooms. We have a computer lab but it is non-functional. Only one projector is available. I am using this to show the digital content. In our projector room we don't have proper infrastructure like chairs and desks so students have to sit on the floor to watch the digital lessons.

The third challenge is maintaining records and reports. We were asked to send different reports on quantitative data like how many of our students got 'A' grade based on gender and caste. The website repeatedly asks for the same data with different formats. This consumes a lot of time and is a distraction to classroom teaching.



Figure 1. Students find it easier to sit on the floor when working in groups.

The fourth challenge is engaging the older boys in classroom activities. Most of the boys are not showing much interest to participate in classroom tasks. They often try to copy from others, never having tried to do the tasks on their own, even though I encourage them to do so without worrying about any errors or mistakes.

The fifth challenge is examination oriented teaching. Teachers' performance is judged by class 10 exam results, so we are generally more focused on class 10 and neglect other classes. Joyful learning is possible with the lower sections but due to pressure from the authorities, we focus too much on class 10 performance.

— 27 —



5. Understanding the learners

Dipika Gode

1. My context and challenges

My school

My school is a coeducation, government-aided, Hindi-medium school in a slum area of Nagpur. The locals around my school belong to working class and lower middle class. The majority of the students come from the migrant community, originally coming from Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar or South India, most with Hindi as their mother tongue. The infrastructure of our school is satisfactory. It is on a main road with no grounds or parking facilities. The school is run in two shifts: Middle school in the morning and high school in the afternoon. We have limited rooms, although all the basic amenities are present. We have approximately 70 teachers and 20 non-teaching staff. Our school has earned a very good reputation and 2020-2021 is a Golden Jubilee year for us!

– 34 –

I am worried about the all-round development of my students. I believe that they should be good human beings first and the rest will follow. I share with them a lot of information, I make them aware of the things going on around them, I discuss about their future and try to make them believe that everyone is unique, with a purpose in life and the most important thing is that we should never quit.

To be very honest, I've been in this profession for 31 years, and all the above comes automatically to me. Self-improvisation has become a habit. Constant innovation in my teaching practices keeps me fresh and enthusiastic.

Factors that affect my teaching

There are many factors that affect the teaching-learning process. I have tried to mention the ones which I think are important from my point of view as a teacher (see Figure 1).

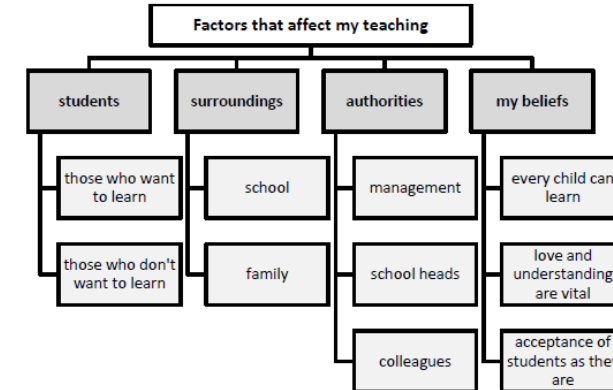


Figure 1. Factors that affect my teaching.

1) Students

Students can be divided into two groups: Those who want to learn and those who don't want to learn. Now this number varies according to the teacher and the subject. When I teach the whole class, there are some who listen, understand, ask and do what is assigned, there are some who pretend to listen and answer but are not mentally present, and then there is a bunch who make you feel their presence but do all the wrong things in class. When I was a novice, I felt depressed when I didn't get the

– 39 –



6. Supporting the least fortunate

Gajanan Tayade

1. My context and challenges

I work in a context that may be similar to many schools across India. The majority of students are from disadvantaged groups, and the students belonging to more privileged backgrounds (so called 'general category') make up only 1-2% of my students. The major occupations of parents of my students are farming, including general labour and keeping sheep or goats. The literacy rate among tribal communities is very low and the parents are often not aware of students' performance at school, so this rural setting greatly influences the learning of their children. The parents are often greatly satisfied with the teachers who provide their children with free education and even transport facilities – apparently it seems a

– 45 –

could find and match the word on the board with the one in the coursebook. In this way, phonics helped them.

Even teachers can be scared of English

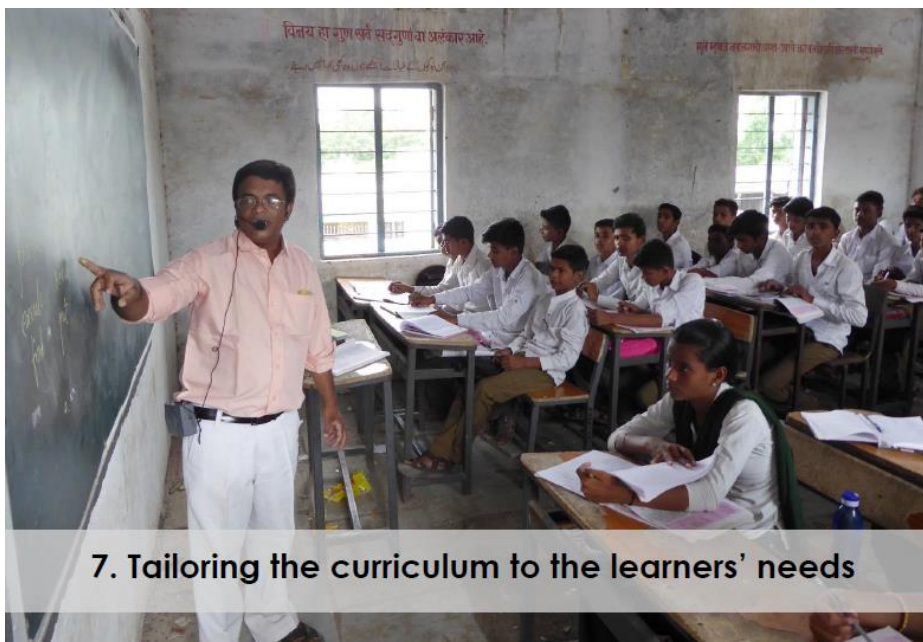
Once I was working on a training programme in Hyderabad for English teachers. One teacher – let us call him Arvind – came to me and said: 'Forgive me, but I have not studied English beyond 12th standard. I have only studied in Marathi, but your training is in English, and I will not understand. Please relieve me from the training programme.' He asked me if he could do other activities, such as snake catching, but please no English. I appreciated him, and heard that he is a snake catcher, so I asked him to tell me more about his hobby. We spent 5-10 minutes talking, and I said: 'I will not admit you in my class, but just stay in the classroom for a day, and if you feel comfortable you can join. If not I can remove you.' After one day, he said he can't make up his opinion. I said, you can stay for as long as you want. If you are uncomfortable you can withdraw. So unofficially I kept him in the programme. He stayed for 10 days. By the time we came to the validation programme, he was using a little English. I asked him: 'Why are you afraid of English?' After that he was motivated. The motivated teachers on the programme were offered a one-year correspondence course, and he wanted to join it, and to learn on his own. Successfully he completed the course, and also completed another American programme. His CPD journey began in that first workshop, and continued for many years. So the message here is: Even if your English is weak, if you take interest and make an effort, you can obtain excellence. Arvind is now a fluent speaker of English. ■

3. My advice for colleagues with similar challenges

Here is some advice for new teachers who work in a context similar to mine:

- You should first be very friendly with your students and should not think that punishment would serve you well. Instead of punishing the students, you should try to understand the students: who they are, their context, and their difficulties. If they are not studying well, ask them why.
- You should use simple language that the students can understand. If you have learnt English literature at university, this can be very formal, but for language learning in the classroom, the teacher should avoid using words that are not familiar to the students. You should use simple constructions and avoid complex or compound sentences. Keep to familiar vocabulary. Check the language level of the students regularly. When you give instructions in the

– 51 –



7. Tailoring the curriculum to the learners' needs

Shekhar Khomne

1. My context and challenge

I work in a government secondary school which is located in a small village in central Maharashtra. I have been teaching English and History to grade IX and X. In my school many students come from a very poor background. Their parents work on farms. Naturally they are not aware of the education of their wards. In such a situation my role as a teacher has a wide scope. I mean, beyond my teaching I have to be their parent also. Purchasing sandals, uniforms and satchels for them has become my regular responsibility.

My biggest challenge is teaching the text to my learners. Generally students' comprehension is very poor. Perhaps, this might be their family background as their parents are also low qualified. Whatever is done in the class by the teacher is final for them. Every year there are 60-65 students in each of my classes. At times the strength

— 53 —

Shekhar Khomne

seventh or eighth period I insert a pen drive into it and get my students to listen to a speech, a song or a prayer.

3. My advice for colleagues with similar challenges

Friends, you might have the same challenges and limitations that I have. What will you do then to overcome them?

- For large classes, appoint volunteers (students who are sincere) and assign them the task of collecting the notebooks of students, checking and returning them to the students. Project work can also be managed by these volunteers.
- Try to manage your classroom without furniture if possible. Take your headmaster into confidence for this. If there is no furniture you find a good amount of space in the class (see Figure 2). Your learners can leave their places and move here and there. You become a bit more comfortable forming groups. Even regrouping is also possible. Learners can reach the board for some activity. Individual work can also be monitored because you get enough space to walk here and there.
- If you can revise content through 'content games' like quizzes, it will save your time and elicitation can be done in a play-way manner.



Figure 2. Groupwork can be easier in classrooms with no furniture.

— 58 —



8. Bringing the best out of our learners

Kuheli Mukherjee

1. My context and challenges

My Context

'Creeng-creeng-creeng!' the phone goes on ringing. I open my eyes and pick up the phone. A happy and childish voice says 'Ma'am I just submitted my assignment. Have you received it?' Oh, what time is it? A look at the bedside watch confirms it is just 6 a.m. in the morning and yes, that is how most of my days start during Covid induced lockdown... This was one of my 7th graders completing the task I had assigned on a social media group of my school students the evening before. Well, I have been teaching English as a second language (ESL) in a well-known government run Higher Secondary school in Kolkata for around three decades. My school, with a history of

– 59 –

Kuheli Mukherjee

development but the fact remains that even as researcher I find it difficult to record my reflections regularly and systematically due to time constraints. Still I do scribble thoughts or reflective notes in a diary on a regular basis.

2. My Teaching

My Beliefs

My own experience of learning English has played a vital role in developing my beliefs about learning a second or a foreign language. Studying in a vernacular medium school, my interest in English grew because of the attitude of my English teacher. She was always encouraging us to use English notwithstanding the mistakes we made. She would be recasting my sentences with an affectionate smile that was reassuring and confidence boosting. So from the first day as a teacher I felt I should try to make my class interesting to my learners and try to be someone whom learners are not afraid of. Secondly, I always believed that learning a language means being able to use that language in speaking as well as writing. So enabling my learners to use English in their practical life was my objective. Since childhood I was a voracious reader of literature in Bangla, my mother tongue, and English also. I would always keep a dictionary handy to understand difficult words while reading anything in English. I strongly believed in the effectiveness of such extensive reading on the language learning of my students. Later, my training in TESOL along with my long experience as a teacher and in-service teacher trainer helped me realize that these beliefs have played a significant role in making me the teacher I am.

Curriculum coverage and my planning

The mandatory pre-service teacher education course taught me how to plan lessons to facilitate language learning. However, while teaching in school I hardly have time for meticulous planning. Nevertheless, I have realized that if I did not have overall planning to cover the syllabus, it would be difficult to achieve curriculum objectives for my students. Since we have to follow a prescribed syllabus for each grade, at the beginning of the term I make a plan for how much of the syllabus I would cover and what learning outcomes I should be targeting. I do not believe in merely covering the syllabus, but in attaining expected learning outcomes of my learners. So it might happen that I do not complete teaching all the lessons in the prescribed text with equal emphasis. Rather, I would focus on developing skill-specific language

– 62 –

Critical caution

- Cornwall (2008, p. 274): “participatory interventions may result in effects that were never envisaged at the outset”.
- Design may sacrifice rigour in order to mitigate/address participant concerns or suggestions.
- Teacher expertise studies are likely to report positive findings, **but** “studies in which there are likely to be a number of critical findings may encounter more challenges when attempting to achieve a degree of useful participation” (Anderson, 2023a, p. 306).
- Those interested in conducting partially participatory studies should read Traianou’s cautionary tale (2007).

References / Q&A

Anderson, J. (2021). *Eight expert Indian teachers of English: A participatory comparative case study of teacher expertise in the Global South* [Doctoral dissertation]. Coventry, UK: University of Warwick Publications Service and WRAP. Retrieved from <http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/159940/>

Anderson, J. (2023a). Can teacher case study research be participatory? Critical reflections on the approach adopted for an English language teacher expertise study in India. *TESOL Quarterly*, 57(1), 298-309. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3183>

Anderson, J. (2023b). *Teacher expertise in the global South: Theory, research and evidence*. Cambridge University Press.

Anderson, J. & Lightfoot, A. (2021). Translingual practices in English classrooms in India: Current perceptions and future possibilities. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 24(8), 1210-1231. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2018.1548558>

Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35(4), 216-224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225>

BAAL [British Association for Applied Linguistics] (2016). Recommendations on good practice in applied linguistics. BAAL. <https://www.baal.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/BAAL-Good-Practice-Guidelines-2021.pdf>

Bergold, J., & Thomas, S. (2012). Participatory research methods: A methodological approach in motion. *Historical Social Research*, 37(4), 191-222. <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-13.1.1801>

Cornwall, A. (2008). Unpacking 'participation': Models, meanings and practices. *Community Development Journal*, 43(3), 269-283. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsn010>

Cornwall, A., & Jewkes, R. (1995). What is participatory research? *Social Science and Medicine*, 41(12), 1667-1676. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536\(95\)00127-S](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536(95)00127-S)

Finn, J. L. (1994). The promise of participatory research. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, 5(2), 25-42. https://doi.org/10.1300/J059v05n02_03

Gode, D., Khomne, S., Lingala, R., Mukherjee, K., Naik Khwaja, N., Prathikantam, V. R., Sagrolikar, M., & Tayade, G. (2021). *Connecting Eight Effective ELT Classrooms: Contexts, Challenges and Solutions*. New Delhi: AINET. https://theainet.net/connecting_eight_effective_ELT_classrooms.pdf

Hansen, H. P., Ramstead, J., Richer, S., Smith, S., & Stratton, M. (2001). Unpacking participatory research in education. *Interchange*, 32(3), 295-322. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1012499200443>

Hart, R. A. (1992). *Children's participation: From tokenism to citizenship* (Innocenti essays, No. 4). UNICEF.

Prathikantam, V. R. (2021). Peer observation: A self-reflective tool. *Telangana SCERT Teaching Journal*, Nov-Dec 2021, 9-10.

Pretty, J. N. (1995). Participatory learning for sustainable agriculture. *World Development*, 23(8), 1247-1263. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X\(95\)00046-F](https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X(95)00046-F)

Thiollent, M. (2011). Action research and participatory research: An overview. *International Journal of Action Research*, 7(2), 160-174. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssaoar-414079>

Traianou, A. (2007). Ethnography and the perils of the single case: An example from the sociocultural analysis of primary science expertise. *Ethnography and Education*, 2(2), 209-220. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457820701350616>

