



Uncovering a hidden world

Josianne Block

reflects on classroom research.

A few years ago, while working toward a degree, my tutor encouraged me to try classroom research as part of my dissertation. At first, I was both intrigued and intimidated. The concept of translanguaging had caught my attention, especially since I worked with multilingual learners who used English daily. I wanted to explore how they navigated communication, and I also hoped to better understand translanguaging and apply it as a teaching tool. But classroom research? The idea felt daunting and overwhelming. I had hoped to develop my research skills through something different from the habitual teaching I was doing at the time. I admit I had little understanding of what classroom research entailed and dreaded the extra workload it might bring. After all, my students loved my lessons and I was very confident in my teaching. Why complicate things when everything

seemed fine? Still, I began reading more about this type of and, although the notion remained daunting, I decided to embrace the challenge. What followed was a journey that transformed my

perspective on teaching and research. Here are five things I learnt along the way.

1 Classroom research is a collaborative process with learners

This classroom research was not a solitary act and it depended on all the classroom members. My research participants were also my students, and I had already been teaching them for a couple of months before starting the project. This proved invaluable because the students already knew my personality and teaching style, and we had built reciprocal trust. This trust made the research process smoother: for them it felt like just another 'cool' project we were doing together as a class. For instance, students regularly helped me set up the camera while others reorganised the classroom for different activities. Their excitement fuelled my

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own enthusiasm. To ensure I gained deep insights into their thoughts and feelings about the lessons, I used exit tickets. Since they were beginner learners of English, I allowed them to write in any language they preferred and then translated their responses using online tools. This approach ensured they were not limited by their English vocabulary and could express themselves as they wanted. Their responses shaped my lessons, since they influenced both my lesson planning and group formations. I gave students more agency and voice in determining classroom dynamics, transforming them into co-researchers (Pinter *et al.*, 2016). They were not just research participants but valuable contributors to this collective learning journey.

2 Classroom research benefits the professional self

In an interview with Daniel Xerri, Richard Smith describes classroom research as an opportunity for teachers to ‘hear their students and see themselves’ (Smith,

2018:38). This perfectly aligns with my experience. While I aimed to facilitate learning by adapting my teaching practices to meet my students’ needs, soon I learnt that the biggest learner in this journey was myself. Through deep introspection on my teaching philosophy and reflections on how my teaching impacted students within and beyond the classroom, I can humbly say classroom research transformed me into a better professional. This led to more informed and adaptive teaching practices, indirectly benefiting students too. However, wearing the two hats of teacher and researcher was not easy and I had to make important ethical considerations. As their teacher and the only adult present in the classroom, I automatically held more authority. Therefore, I worked hard to ensure students felt comfortable being themselves. Knowing them beforehand helped, and I made an effort to bridge any age gap by staying interested in their adolescent world. To further reduce my presence during groupwork, I sometimes monitored them from outside the classroom while they did the activities. Surprisingly,

although students were being recorded, they often forgot about the camera entirely. Obtaining informed consent and assent from the students and their guardians was also crucial. Since I was working with adolescents, I made sure that I provided them with age-appropriate information about the research and that the language I used reflected their English language proficiency (Mathew & Pinter, 202:206–222). Looking back, while it sometimes felt time-consuming, I now acknowledge how the project deepened my understanding of both research and teaching as I started to appreciate the entire process.

3 Time management and organisation are key

I won’t sugarcoat it: classroom research demands time and commitment. For someone like me, who was inexperienced with research, it could even be overwhelming at times. That is why planning my time in advance, chunking data collection, and keeping everything organised in tables were essential strategies. I can still picture myself writing reflective journal entries on the mini-van ride home, worried that I would forget key details if I waited too long. While this discipline was helpful, looking back, I believe I could have been more practical. Weekly reflections might have sufficed instead of daily entries. Moreover, conducting research over an entire school year, rather than a few months, might have made the process less intense and provided a more holistic



understanding of my classroom. One wise decision, however, was using Farrell's (2014) framework for reflecting on practice. This served as a compass to conduct the research in a structured manner. As I repeated the process through three different cycles, I uncovered new insights about my learners and myself as a practitioner. This aligns with Freeman's (2016) idea that 'teacher education provides tools and opportunities to use them, which allow participants to rename their experiences and thus to (re)construct what they do' (Freeman, 2016:229).

4 I was not prepared to challenge my assumptions, but I did

Classroom discoveries will not always align with your beliefs – but that's OK. In my case, my perceptions and the actual findings were starkly different. At times my beliefs were affirmed, but, more often, they were dismantled. While listening to the recordings, I uncovered a hidden world of classroom dynamics. Students that I admired, and who had always shown me respect, sometimes treated their peers poorly. Lessons which I thought were engaging proved dull for some and confusing to others. I discovered I had my own biases which at times impacted my classroom actions. However, the biggest challenge was revisiting my ideas about translanguaging. At the start of the project, I was convinced of its benefits, and the findings did show that it helped learners during meaning negotiation processes. However, I found out that it could also lead to exclusionary practices and an overdependence on learners' own languages (Block, 2025b). This was difficult to grasp, but reading relevant contemporary research reassured me that classroom findings do not always align with current trends. During the research process, I 'made peace' with the fact that it is acceptable to question existing pedagogical beliefs and practices (Block, 2025a:46).

5 Classroom research builds a sense of community

When I conducted the study, the school was still not quite familiar with the idea of classroom research, so my project instilled curiosity. I still cherish staffroom

discussions which ranged from me enthusiastically sharing the benefits of classroom research to debating translanguaging with those favouring monolingual approaches. I relied on peers when technical issues arose and had all the support I needed from the school leadership team. This sense of collegiality reminded me that I was not alone. Since we shared the same teaching context, my colleagues could understand my challenges and motivations, and this proved to be invaluable. Being a novice teacher-researcher at the time, I understood that it is often teachers with similar experiences as myself who can provide the most effective guidance (Xerri, 2018). However, engaging in classroom research also connected me with broader international communities of teacher-researchers who value the same ideas and share the same passions. Teaching, and learning about teaching, truly transcends borders.

I've had people tell me: 'Classroom research should be part of a teacher's daily life, not something you just do for a degree.' This is totally understandable, and they are partly right. But at its very core, classroom research is about bridging theory with practice and making the abstract more tangible. Although this classroom project was 'research on children, about children, with children, and by children' (Pinter *et al.*, 2016:13), it was also research on my professional self, about my professional self. Educational psychologist Lee Shulman once said: 'classroom teaching is perhaps the most complex, most challenging, and most demanding and frightening activity that our species has ever invented.' Classroom research is about making teaching less frightening (yet equally complex). I invite practitioners to, just like I did, embark

on classroom research projects. Yes, it is challenging and demanding – but this is also what makes it so intriguing and, ultimately, addictive.

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