What can we take home? Action Research for Malaysian pre-service TESOL teachers in Australia

ROD NEILSEN

Deakin University, Australia

Abstract: *Action Research (AR) is recognised as an effective way for language teachers to extend teaching skills and gain more understanding of teaching, learning and the classroom environment (Burns, 2010). It can also be a useful but challenging experience for trainee language teachers. This paper reports on the experiences of Malaysian trainee primary TESOL teachers who undertook an AR project during their practicum in Brisbane schools as part of a joint Bachelor of Education programme with an Australian University. The experience was demanding, as the trainees learned about AR methodology in the context of a practicum which was not only their first experience of teaching, but also took place in an unfamiliar cultural environment. The experience appeared useful in terms of developing habits of flexibility and reflexivity, yet some of the group expressed reservations on how useful the classroom pedagogies taught in the course would be in their home context. Findings contribute to the limited literature on language teacher development in cross-cultural environments and raise an important question for teacher educators: should AR be part of a larger field that we know as social theory or should the focus be more narrow and limited to the development of educational theory?*

Keywords: *TESOL; Action Research; pre-service teachers; joint courses; knowledge base of teaching; professional identity; cross-cultural contexts; teacher reflexivity*

Introduction: Action Research traditions and cross-cultural programs

Action Research (AR) has long been recognised in the field of language education as an instrument for practising teachers to continually reshape their knowledge of teaching and learning (Farrell, 2008). In the field of TESOL, McDonough (2006) finds that AR is a useful tool for teachers to develop context-specific, personal theories of second language teaching. Other identified benefits are: fostering a community of learning and

providing the opportunity for student teachers to recognise and accept the roles imperfection and incompleteness play in the construction of teacher identity (Trent, 2010); forming more realistic teaching goals (Ebsworth, Eisenstein, Jeong & Klein, 2010); and the opportunity to collaborate with experienced mentors (Levin & Rock, 2003). For pre-service teachers, there are opportunities "to develop content pedagogical knowledge, examine beliefs about teaching, and gain confidence" through AR projects (Lundeberg, Bergland & Klyczek, 2003, p.1). There is therefore emerging a corresponding and growing body of research as self-directed, inquiry-based professional development models of teacher education are increasingly replacing more traditional models (Geyer, 2008).

This transformative, behaviour-changing aspect is generally accepted as useful for the professional development of teachers, but it can also have larger implications for national education systems (see, for example, Zhan's 2008 study of in-service and pre-service English teachers in Baoding, China). There are therefore two strands of Teacher AR: firstly, the original form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out (Carr & Kemmis 1986, p. 162). The second tradition has been described as a systematic gathering of information designed to effect social change (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 223; Zeichner & Gore, 1995). As Kemmis (2010) observes, AR certainly contributes to theory, but its more important role may be its contribution to history.

The second tradition has important implications in the light of the growing commitment of Australian Higher Education providers to globalised practices and joint programs. Australia is committed to making more connections with Asia, via, for example, Asia Literacy initiatives, and this has certain implications for educational methodologies across differing contexts. A common response in cross-cultural training programs is that transfer of methodology from one cultural context to another can be problematic. Methodology has been seen as cultural imposition, not a neutral set of educational tools (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994). AR, as one example, is commonly used in western education systems, but it is still less familiar in other contexts. Canagarajah (1999, 2002) and others have critiqued applications of western methodology within non-western contexts, and the issue is still present in the context of growing numbers of educational partnerships.

There is still very little literature on collaborations in higher education despite the continuing growth of joint programs worldwide

(Michael & Balraj, 2003). There are even fewer studies to date on the particular type of cross-cultural context investigated in the present study. This case specifically involves Malaysian primary TESOL teachers in training during a joint Malaysian-Australian degree program who are implementing AR in their coursework, and whose practicum students are mostly native English-speaking young learners. The responses from the trainees justified the use of AR in their practicums in the light of the first tradition mentioned above, since there were reported and observable gains in confidence and pedagogical and content awareness. Crucially though, the teachers-in-training in this group developed an appreciation of differences in cultural context, marking a growing awareness of the socially transformative power of AR. They developed an awareness of different cultural underpinnings in educational practices, and began to compare and critique these. This resulted in expressed wariness about transferring practices learned in Australia to their home context.

The study

For over ten years, until the program ended recently, cohorts of students from Malaysian institutions took part in a joint degree program with a Brisbane university for a Bachelor of Education (Primary TESOL). They studied in Queensland for the second and third years of the program. Their first year in Malaysia included units such as foundations of linguistics and philosophy of Malaysian education, with some observation of local classrooms. In Australia, in their third year, the students took a core Field studies unit, which involved a practicum in Brisbane primary schools of one day a week over the semester. The companion core unit, which focused on TESOL methodology, entailed classroom-based research; assessment items were linked to the practicum. This study is based on the experiences of a senior (Year Three) cohort in this unit, which essentially involved the development of individual AR projects; the students were encouraged to design these to focus on a specific aspect of their teaching; they could choose to focus on an aspect of content, such as building language skills, or general pedagogy. The aim of the study reported here was to explore three specific questions relating to their experiences of doing AR in their Australian teaching practicum:

1. What is the depth of the trainees' understanding of the value and process of AR?
2. To what extent has the AR experience fostered the development of the habit of reflection?
3. How useful do the students see the experience with regard to their future teaching in Malaysia?

In asking these questions I felt that the responses might lead to course enhancement, and also throw further light on the value of the intercultural experience that such joint programs are supposed to foster. Formal ethical clearance was obtained once the unit and its assessment were completed.

The AR projects

All fifty-seven trainees prepared individual AR projects. Set readings and one particular text, *Doing Action Research in English Language Teaching: a Guide for Practitioners* by Ann Burns (2010) was used to provide examples and illustrate the AR cycle, based on Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) model. Trainees were instructed to focus on one aspect of their teaching they wished to develop or investigate. This resulted in a roughly even balance between focus on general pedagogical skills and on skills related to language teaching; examples include *giving constructive feedback, scaffolding for learning, teaching vocabulary, reading, pronunciation, handwriting, giving instructions, increasing motivation, setting up small group work,* and *improving questioning skills.*

The trainees prepared an outline for their AR plan by week four of the semester, then I consulted with every member of the cohort to ensure that the focus was appropriate and that their aims were achievable in the relatively short time available. Once the topics were finalised the students then implemented the first and second actions of the AR cycle over the following six weeks. The first assessment item was a classroom presentation of their research with a written report. The second assignment was a written reflective piece about the process of learning to become a teacher, which encompassed the AR project, the teaching practicum as a whole, and their overall experience of learning to teach outside their home country.

The primary practicum classes the trainees taught were varied, due to the logistics of school placements. The cohort taught a range of classes from Years 2 to 7. Most classrooms were ethnically and culturally diverse, and included students with learning disabilities in some cases. Some were English as Second Language (ESL) classes, others mainstream, but the majority of the practicum classes involved some kind of oracy/literacy focus. Trainees were encouraged to use or develop their own materials; a number used Malaysian reading materials such as folk tales in this new context, which gave the advantage of a shared morality in tales, and the experience of presenting familiar (to them) cultural artefacts in new settings.

Data collection

The data obtained for the study consisted of recorded interviews and samples of previously assessed work, which included the AR reports and overall reflections. The trainees were recipients of scholarships from the Malaysian government, therefore I was aware there might be sensitive issues around giving opinions of the Malaysian schooling system; however, their responses suggested that they felt that the Malaysian education department was open to the possibility of change, as this was seen as one of the aims of the joint program. After gaining ethics approval I asked all the students by email if they were willing to participate in an interview about their experiences of the AR project, and sought their permission to refer to samples of their assessed work. From the responses, eight trainees were purposively selected for interview, on the basis of representing the balance of gender and ethnicities within the group (approximately 70% female, overall majority ethnic Malay with 10% ethnic Chinese and Indian). Twenty written samples of assignments were selected—ten of each assignment; each batch included four assignments from interview participants. The spoken interviews and written data were then analysed for their considerations of educational and social theoretical concepts.

Results (1): data from assignments

The AR reports and reflective assignments indicated the ways in which the trainees were developing their professional identities. Signs of developing critical reflection were evident in only a few assignments. An opportunity for critical comment could have been taken, for example, by comparing the Australian and Malaysian educational contexts the trainees had experienced. However, it was notable that while discussions involving such comparisons were present in interviews, comment on this was generally absent in written work, even though it had been made clear that for these assignments the trainees could reflect on their experiences to date in all aspects of the program, at home and in Australia.

Another point of interest was that a significant number (around 50%) of the reflective assignments used metaphors to approach new understandings of the teaching journey. Nikitina and Furuoka (2008) have investigated the style and popularity of metaphors with regard to teaching in Malaysian culture; this reflects a wider acknowledgment of the value of pursuing metaphorical analysis in second and foreign language teaching (Block, 1992; Boers, 2003). Metaphors in the assignments collected included the teacher as waiter, ship's captain, a Master chef and a blacksmith, reflecting perceived values of customer

service, creativity, leadership and responsibility as they relate to teaching. One particularly thought-provoking metaphor was provided by a student who wove the story of The Wizard of Oz into his entire teaching journey, ultimately asking (himself) the question: what have you learned, Dorothy? The journey from Malaysia to Australia was the cyclone that shifted Dorothy from Kansas to the land of Oz. The scarecrow without a brain yearned for knowledge of L2 teaching. The Tin Man without a heart illustrated the need for emotional involvement in L2 learning; and the cowardly lion had to learn to be creative and brave in encouraging learners to become autonomous.

New pedagogical understandings
A specific theme of developing pedagogical awareness emerged throughout the written work; new understandings emerged from pedagogical connections made during the AR and practicum experiences. The relationship of the reflexive process to the trainees' ongoing experience was referred to as professionally formative: some expressed that they were not able to fully identify their strengths and weaknesses from a short teaching practicum, but several reported it made them resilient and curious to begin their real teaching journey.

Approximately half of the twenty students whose assignments were sampled focused on general pedagogical issues such as classroom management and teaching style, the other half on specific language teaching skills. However, the assignments (and the interviews) revealed that students made frequent connections between the two, and these connections also stimulated new understandings; as an example, several noted that effective management of class, pair and group work, and techniques of questioning and giving instructions promoted useful interaction in a second language. Another observation was that the grounding of feedback within Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development made the trainees realise the link between scaffolding and learner motivation. The work of questioning techniques as scaffolding was a focus of development for some, and as this developed, an understanding of the connections between question types and higher order thinking also became clearer.

A number of trainees commented in their assignments that they had gained deep understanding of the need to be flexible; this was demonstrated in their increased capacity to adjust or change their original AR focus as new discoveries were made. This flexibility also arose from their clearer awareness of the gaps between theory and practice in pedagogy, and led to more skilful decision-making, a major benefit Phillips and Carr (2009) concluded for AR practice. Further

examples of skilful action emerged as trainees commented on specific pedagogical understandings: for example, awareness of the need to break activities such as modelling or instructions into smaller steps, awareness of the need to match types of teacher-talk appropriately to age, and of how student-student interaction can be effectively utilised in pair or group work. There were also gains through observation of what more experienced teachers do, for example, focusing on the less responsive students rather than those who respond more readily and are therefore more visible.

Awareness of students' different learning styles led to the encouragement of a variety of skills strategies, in reading for example. Connections were made between sub-skills, as one trainee realised the importance of connecting vocabulary to pronunciation and to topic areas or themes. Others found that the perceived increase in their general level of proficiency as teachers was linked with recognising the need for students' ownership of the learning process.

Finally, substantial gains in confidence were reported; as one trainee commented, AR outcomes included "having the tools", and crucially, unsuccessful outcomes were perceived as less directly connected with the personal self. Problems were no longer perceived as intrinsically personal (e.g. "bad teaching"). Rather, they were elements of practice to be improved. This realisation in particular is crucial in the construction of a professional identity, of which central social aspects are membership and agency (Price, 2001).

Results (2): interview data
The interview questions sought to clarify the students' experiences with the AR project, as it related to their professional development, and also more specifically to cross-cultural educational issues. The complete list of questions can be found in Appendix 1. I have divided the results into three general themes as expressed in the research questions.

Question 1: The trainees' changing concept of AR and how it shaped their experience in the practicum
Echoing the findings of Stevens and Kitchen (2005) on introducing pre-service teachers to AR, most students interviewed did not have a clear idea of AR in the beginning, although most assumed it involved "action" of some kind. Many initially perceived it as being "huge with theory" or focusing on the students. One thought it was "numbers, statistics, really hard, I'm not qualified", but he later stated that he realised it was achievable, and also transferrable to future practice.

Most came to the realisation during the course that it was a practical exercise, and that it was about improvement and identifying problems with the learning environment as represented by the interaction between teacher and students. One trainee appreciated being able to pursue a "passion" even if "minor". Generally, the process of problematising made the trainees aware of issues that would otherwise not have been noticed, let alone addressed. The cyclical (or "spiral" as one trainee described it) nature of the AR was understood by the end of the course by all those interviewed, and their concept of teacher reflexivity was reported as strengthened. There was also a realisation that planned actions "didn't always come out as expected", which Trent (2010) identifies as of benefit, so adjustments were made and flexibility applied in planning the second action of the cycle. Several perceived AR as "a process of learning to improve techniques", and most found it highly enjoyable (in some cases after the initial shock of realising that the teaching practicum was not solely an observation exercise!). The practicum was also part of another core unit, Field Studies, which was initially an opportunity to observe experienced teachers, but the AR project meant they would have to both do some actual teaching and treat it as research. Some admitted they were unprepared for this, and reported feeling the time pressure of having to perform two action cycles within a limited number of classes. The support of classroom teachers who had agreed to be mentors was reported as invaluable; many gave extended teaching slots to the trainees, as well as advice, support, and suggestions for an AR focus. Most trainees claimed to have become more systematic in their planning and teaching, as well as more reflexive as a result of the experience.

Question 2: Changing perceptions of the role of teachers, and their ongoing sense of professional development

The trainees' responses demonstrated their evolving understandings of the complexity of their roles as teachers. As one trainee reported, teaching was "dynamic and interesting", but "not an easy job". Another trainee summarised thus: "The AR helped me to see what my current knowledge is and what it is to be in the world of a teacher". Others commented that it was all about balancing or realising they had reached a particular developmental stage professionally, and could better envisage future directions of development. They demonstrated an increased ability to set realistic goals, a benefit Ebsworth et al. (2010) claim for AR. Many indicated an increased understanding of discrete pedagogical issues such as giving instructions, scaffolding, or an increased ability to guide skills development, such as in reading or writing.

Initially, several of the trainees felt that their central role was to establish control or dominance—as one put it: to "dominate like Hitler"! Naturally they expected to interact with students, but many were only vaguely aware of the extra duties that went with teaching, such as playground duty, meetings, collecting workbooks, marking, or preparing resources. They became aware that the social role of teaching had as much importance as the educational role, and that as teachers they would have to interact with the larger community. Most commented on the changing perceptions of their interaction with students. They began to see their roles as "facilitators", who needed to build "friendly, healthy relationships", not only with students, but with colleagues, management, and also parents. Several claimed that their understanding of students' needs and capabilities was more focused as a result of the project.

The issue of language proficiency arose in some interviews. The trainees noted the irony of being second language speakers of English, while working as trainee English teachers with English native-speaking or bilingual students. One reported that her accent had prompted frequent clarification requests from young students. However, none reported this as a major problem, and any embarrassment appeared minor. Their use of English was a common area of reflection, however; a significant number of trainees chose to work on classroom language –their task instructions and questioning techniques. In general, the trainees saw the experience in Australia as an opportunity to improve their English proficiency, which they saw as central to their future role.

The developing habit of reflexivity was discussed in all interviews, and was apparent in written work also. All reported a deepening of their ability to reflect on their professional and social experiences. However, as Elliott (1991) notes, this is a difficult and complex process. One interesting perception was that the reflexive habit "haunted them" and "became part of everyday life". During their stay in Brisbane they lived together in university residences, and in informal situations their conversations on reflexivity often moved from coursework towards more everyday subjects, as they continued to "reflect on" and analyse daily routines such as cooking, or even informal conversations with friends. This was reported as being the source of much amusement, which relieved some of the sense of pressure experienced during the project.

Question 3: Cross-cultural issues in the practicum and implications for teaching English in Malaysia

Cross-cultural aspects of the practicum experience were a major focus

in this study; the trainees were not only guests in practicum classrooms and schools, but representatives of another culture, often in classrooms with groups of ethnically diverse migrants learning English as a second language. How they perceived differences between their experiences of Brisbane classes and their home context was of particular interest, given the nature of the joint degree program.

Trainees reported that they themselves were often seen as "exotic and interesting" by their students, and naturally many used Malaysian cultural content in teaching practice, such as the Malaysian folk tales mentioned earlier. One trainee even claimed that curiosity caused students to listen more closely to him than to their regular class teacher. Another felt that although Malaysia was also a multicultural environment, her Brisbane classroom was still a challenge. The new cultural setting put her in a space where she felt "forced to begin to think critically". It was a learning experience for her to interact with Africans, Europeans, and even Malaysians settled in Australia. Many reported the importance of bonding with particular students and how this made them more aware of the variety and complexity of student needs. Their perceptions of notable differences in educational context between Australia and Malaysia are summarised in the following six points that emerged in the interviews:

a) *In Australia Primary teachers tend to be responsible for all subjects in the class, whereas in Malaysia there are often different teachers for different subjects*; the trainees saw the opportunities to bond with a particular group of students in Australia as positive. Several felt that on their return home there would be fewer opportunities to connect and develop relationships with students in their schools, and that this was a limitation.

b) *In Malaysia teaching English is "truly ESL"*; an interesting comment, as a number actually taught in ESL classes in Brisbane. On further questioning, students seemed to be referring to the contested status of the English language in Malaysia, which has fluctuated in the education system there according to policy changes (Azman, 2004), but nevertheless has significant presence as a colonial legacy.

c) *Higher order thinking is encouraged in Australian classrooms through a variety of questioning techniques*; one trainee commented that when teachers question students in class in Malaysia it is often perceived as threatening. The power relations involved in questioning can be seen to have differing cultural underpinnings in the two contexts. The use

of open questions as a form of scaffolding was reported as a new and unfamiliar technique for several trainees.

d) *Educational expectations are different between the two countries*, so it may not be possible to apply techniques and procedures developed in Australia and expect the same results. As one trainee noted: "we can't ask them (in Malaysia) to change approach, but maybe we can show the benefits of it". Trainees thus expressed recognition that some new techniques were worth trying in their own context, even if there was initial resistance.

e) *Class sizes are much larger in Malaysia*; in their Brisbane practicum schools, one-to-one interaction with students was frequently possible. One trainee stated that large classes would hinder attempts to foster constructivist pedagogy in Malaysian schools, and that consequently the traditional model of transmission teaching was more appropriate there. Others too felt that it would be a challenge to implement some aspects of methodology perceived as western, such as language games or learner-centred approaches, in Malaysia. Games were seen as "not serious", and learner-centred approaches might conflict with differing perceptions of social cohesion.

f) *Criticism of teachers by students was possible in Australia*; one trainee who asked for honest feedback on her teaching was told by a year seven student that her lesson sequence was boring; she claims she was not angry, but felt that in Malaysia, teachers wouldn't accept criticism. This would be seen as conflicting with the social role of the teacher.

The last interview question asked trainees to imagine doing their practicum and AR in Malaysian schools. There were conflicting comments about how much mentor support they might receive. While one person felt levels of support would be high from class teachers there, as "people are very generous with newcomers", another thought that in Malaysia teachers would not be so helpful, because of time restrictions: "Malaysian teachers have too much responsibility for everything" was one comment. Many reported that their class teacher in Brisbane helped them considerably with resources such as photocopying, and gave them a great deal of their time to help develop their projects. The trainees certainly expressed gratitude to their mentoring class teachers for making extra time available for them, although there was a general (positive) perception that this capacity was built into the Australian system, but perhaps not to the same extent in Malaysia.

Discussion

The limitations of AR-based reflection among inexperienced teachers should be acknowledged. As Liston and Zeichner (1990) note, there are few meaningful criteria for establishing what constitute good reasons for educational actions. Phillips and Carr (2009) find that as inexperienced guests in another's school and classroom, teacher trainees may be in danger of producing "untrustworthy" AR results. Pre-service teachers are usually inexperienced in concepts of research as well as pedagogy; therefore, rationalization may masquerade as reflection (Loughran, 2002; Gore, 1991), and reflection by pre-service teachers may be in danger of being isolated and fragmented (Chant, Heafner & Bennett, 2004). However, a major benefit for AR is that it is recognised as useful in helping people to act more intelligently and skilfully, whatever their commencement point professionally and experientially. Evidence from the interviews and written work suggests that the Malaysian trainees began to engage critically with notions of teaching, content, and particularly how new realisations might be applied to their future teaching context. They engaged with both social and educational concepts. They were grounded in their own experiences of their home educational system, and they expressed awareness of how this system might embrace change as their generation enters the educational workforce. They also suggested that whatever the benefits of their joint program, "new" techniques may not be imported wholesale. There seem to be implications that the knowledge and experiences of their AR project will impact on their practices in Malaysia, but they will use their increased awareness to apply change in their own way. As Price and Valli (2005) note, pre-service teachers have the opportunity to become "agents of change". AR theories and practices are being increasingly remodelled in local contexts and used to support educational reform (see Somekh & Zeichner, 2009, for a framework to enable analysis of how AR differs in local settings within and across national boundaries, examples of Appadurai's (2002) "globalisation from below").

Sustained change cannot be unequivocally claimed as a benefit of joint cross-cultural programs without taking a long-term approach. This study is part of ongoing research therefore, and an important later question will be how the graduate teachers adapt and sustain their practices in their actual teaching environment. From Malaysia, a number reported in personal communication that they felt pressure to follow more traditional pedagogical approaches. One student reported attempting to apply communicative techniques by encouraging more spoken English practice in her classroom, but reduced this when

senior teachers frequently "looked in angrily" at the noise that was being produced. However, for most teachers developing the habit of reflexivity was the realisation of a rewarding process linked to their expanded awareness of the complex/multi-faceted roles of the teacher, which include not only content and pedagogical knowledge but also awareness of particular educational and cultural contexts and how they are adapting and changing in the context of globalisation.

To summarise, the study described here involves two educational contexts: an Australian university with a TESOL department grounded in western theoretical approaches to language learning, and the Malaysian Ministry of Education, which has the stated aim of improving English language teaching, against the background of English language policies in schooling that have changed a number of times in the last thirty years. The English language is in a contested place in Malaysia, as language-planning policies have sought since the 1970s to establish Malay as the unifying language of a multicultural nation (see Pennycook, 1994). The sociocultural aspects of AR can therefore place as high a demand on the students as the educational ones—although it is questionable if any research tradition is truly "purely" educational.

This particular case is one that may be replicated with variations as these kinds of educational partnerships are increasing in regularity; future joint courses could, for example, incorporate more focus on the critical interpretation of classroom events, with an emphasis on cultural interpretation. Australia's commitment to Asia Literacy and its geographic proximity are resulting in many partnerships with China and South East Asia, and they may all throw up new educational and social paradigms. Therefore the question of which tradition of AR is most useful in language teacher training continues to be debatable—it may not be easy or even necessary to separate the two strands of AR, as the educational and the social may be inextricably linked.

Conclusion

This study has reported on pre-service teacher experiences of implementing AR in the teaching practicum of a joint Malaysian-Australian TESOL Bachelors degree program. The participants in this study, who are now practicing primary TESOL teachers in Malaysia, are testimony to the value of AR for the development of professional identity as second language teachers. Critical objectivity may have been more developed in some than others, but all trainees showed some kind of engagement with the process. Their engagement was apparent in the understandings gained during the AR process while

identifying focus areas for the development of their teaching, and in the fostering of reflexive practice.

The trainees' responses to the first two research questions align with the original strand of AR as understanding practice so that it may be improved. Trainees reported clear gains in their understanding of the process and value of AR in relation to their journey as TESOL teachers in a context that has experienced frequent policy changes with regard to English. In relation to the third question, all participants enjoyed the cross-cultural experience as "interesting and precious" as one trainee put it, and most felt that some aspects of their experience in Australia would be transferrable to Malaysia if adapted in ways not yet conceptualised. In turn, those involved in administering their course, their practicum students and mentoring teachers all gained some awareness of different educational contexts and cultural perspectives. Responses to the third question inform the second strand of AR where social change may be effected, and this is important for TESOL as a globalised industry which, like the English language itself, is no longer exclusively "owned" by native English speakers. The context of this study provides evidence of a new paradigm in which trends in language education are increasingly mediated by global flows. Findings from this and other studies could have implications for future course programming and increased understanding of local and global educational contexts. In the consequences of joint programs such as the one described here, the educational and social are interlinked. There is the building of professional identity that is the first step in becoming a concerned member of the global TESOL profession, and an agent of change. This in turn can lead to transformations that impact second language teaching practices within the educational contexts of all partners.

REFERENCES

Appadurai, A. (2002). Deep democracy: urban governmentality and the horizon of politics. *Public Culture, 14*(1).

Azman, H. (2004). Global English and English Literacy Education in Malaysia. In P. Lee & H. Azmann (Eds.), *Global English and primary schools: challenges for elementary education.* (pp. 17-29) CAE Press: Melbourne.

Boers, F. (2003). Applied Linguistics Perspectives on Cross-Cultural Variation in Conceptual Metaphor. *Metaphor and Symbol, 18(4), 231-238*

Block, D. (1992) Metaphors we teach and live by. *Prospect, 7*(3), 42–55.

Bogdan, R. & Biklen, S. K. (1992) *Qualitative Research For Education.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Burns, A. (2010). *Doing Action Research in English Language Teaching: A Guide for Practitioners.* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

Canagarajah, A.S. (1999). *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching.* Oxford University Press.

Canagarajah, S. (2002) Globalization, methods, and practice in periphery classrooms. In D. Block and D. Cameron (Eds.). *Globalization and Language teaching,* (pp 134-150). Routledge: London and New York.

Carr, W. & Kemmis, S. (1986). Becoming critical: Education, knowledge and action research. London: Falmer Press.

Chant, R.H., Heafner, T.L., & Bennett, K.R. (2004). Connecting Personal Theorizing and Action Research in Preservice Teacher Development. *Teacher Education Quarterly. 31* (3), 25-42.

Ebsworth, M., Eisenstein, K., Jeong, A, & Klein, T. J. (2010). Projections: From a Graduate TELL Class to the Practical world of L2 Teachers. *CALICO Journal, 2*(2), 349-375.

Elliott, J. (1991). *Action Research for Educational Change.* Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

Farrell, T. S. C. (2008). *Reflective Practice in the Professional Development of Teachers of Adult English Language Learners.* CAELA Network Brief: Center for Adult English Acquisition. Retrieved 1/11/2011   from: http://www.cal.org/caelanetwork/pdfs/ReflectivePracticeFinalWeb.pdf

Geyer, N. (2008). Reflective Practices in Foreign Language teacher Education: A View through Micro and Macro Windows. *Foreign Language Annals, 41*(4) 627-638.

Gore, J.M. (1991) Action research and reflective teaching in pre-service teacher education: a case study from the United States. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 7*(2), 119-136.

Kemmis, S (2010): What is to be done? The place of action research. *Educational Action Research, 18*(4), 417-427.

Kemmis, S., and McTaggart, R. (Eds). (1988). *The action research planner* (3rd ed). Geelong: Deakin University Press.

Levin, B. and Rock, T. (2003). The Effects of Collaborative Action Research on Pre-service and Experienced Teacher partners in Professional Development Schools. *Journal of Teacher Education, 54,* 135-149.

Liston, D.P., and Zeichner, K.M. (1990). Reflective Teaching and Action Research in Pre-service Teacher Education. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 16*(3), 235-254.

Loughran, J.J. (2002). Effective Reflective Practice: In Search of Meaning in Learning about Teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education, 53,* 33-43.

Lundeberg, M., Bergland, M., & Klyczek, K. (2003). Using Action Research to Develop Preservice Teachers' Confidence, Knowledge and Beliefs about Technology. *The Journal of Interactive Online Learning, 1*(4), 1-15.

McDonough, K. (2006). Action Research and the Professional Development of Graduate Teaching Assistants. *The Modern Language Journal, 90*(1), 33-47.

Michael, S.O., & Balraj, B. (2003). Higher Education Institutional Collaborations: an analysis of models of joint degree programs. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 25*(2).

Nikitina, L. & Furuoka, F. (2008). "A Language Teacher is Like…". Examining Malaysian Students' Perceptions of Language Teachers through Metaphor Analysis. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching, 5* (2), 192–205.

Pennycook, A. (1994). *The Cultural politics of English as an international language.* London: Longman.

Phillips, D.K & Carr, K. (2009). Dilemmas of Trustworthiness in pre-service teacher action research. *Action Research, 7*(2), 207-226

Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic Imperialism.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.Price, J.N. (2001). Action research, pedagogy and change: The transformative potential of action research in pre-service teacher education, *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 33*(1),43-74.

Price, N & Valli, L. (2005). Preservice Teachers Becoming Agents of Change: Pedagogical Implications for Action Research. *Journal of Teacher Education, 56*(5).

Somekh, B. & Ken Zeichner, K. (2009): Action research for educational reform: remodelling action research theories and practices in local contexts. *Educational Action Research, 17*(1), 5-21.

Stevens, D. & Kitchen, J. (2005). Introducing pre-service teachers to Action Research. *The Ontario Action Researcher.* Retrieved 29/10/11from http://www.nipissingu.ca/oar/PDFS/V711.pdf

Trent, J. (2010). Teacher Education as Identity Construction: Insights from Action Research. *Journal of Education for Teaching: International Research and Pedagogy, 36*(2), 153-168.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Interaction between learning and development. Mind and Society (*pp 79-91). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Zeichner, K., & Gore, J. (1995). Using action research as a vehicle for

student teacher reflection: A social reconstructionist approach. In S. Noffke & B. Stevenson

(Eds.), *Practically critical: An invitation to action research in education* (pp. 13-30). New York: Teachers College Press.

Zhan, S. (2008). Changes to a Chinese pre-Service language Teacher education Program:

Analysis, Results and Implications. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 36*(1), 53-70.

Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. When you began the Unit, what was your concept of Action Research?
2. Describe your understanding of it now.
3. How did the AR project affect or shape your experience in the practicum?
4. Describe your practicum class. (Ages, cultural backgrounds, curriculum areas observed or participated in).
5. Did you perceive cultural differences among your students? How did this affect you? (in terms of planning, interaction, etc.)
6. When you started the fieldwork, how did you perceive your role as a teacher?
7. Did this change over the course of the semester?
8. Did you feel you developed professionally and/or personally while undertaking the AR project? How?
9. Do you think you are developing a habit of reflection as a developing teacher? Give examples.
10. How did you feel about doing the practicum and associated projects in another country, rather than your own?
11. If you had done your practicum in Malaysia instead, with an AR assignment, how do you think it might have been different?

Rod Neilsen lectures in TESOL at Deakin University, Melbourne. His doctoral thesis explored the relationship of expatriate TESOL teachers to the process of globalisation. His research interests include language teacher development and intercultural aspects of language learning. He is currently investigating language awareness across disciplines in teacher training.   rod.neilsen@deakin.edu.au