UNIVERSITY *of York*

This is a repository copy of *Teaching English to Young Learners: International TEYL Research Papers 2018*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/129679/

Version: Accepted Version

Other:

Gregson, Kate (Accepted: 2018) Teaching English to Young Learners: International TEYL Research Papers 2018. UNSPECIFIED. (Unpublished)

White Rose
university consortium
Universities of Leeds, Sheffield & York

eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/
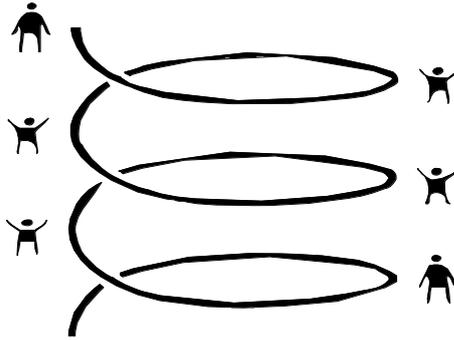
Teaching English To Young Learners:

International TEYL Research

Papers: 2018

Edited by Kate Gregson

Department of Education

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

Contents

Foreword

Welcome to the 2018 set of TEYL Research Seminar Papers. These papers intend to contribute current, quality, situated research in the field of Teaching English to Young Learners.

This research, undertaken by former MA in TEYL students for their final module of their degree, represents a diversity of topics, techniques and contexts within the field of TEYL. Nonetheless, the papers have in common a rigorous methodological process of participant selection, data collection and analysis. Undertaking both Action Research *and* applying an experimental design study in educational setting is no small feat: all researchers report on the many practical and ethical obstacles they faced - and overcame.

The focal areas of the research reported on in this publication range from the use of portfolios to develop metacognitive awareness of listening processes (Eichenberger) to other aspects of self- and peer-assessment, such as to develop particular problematic language areas (Dark) and to develop oral fluency (Lendi-Duran Sanchez); they also investigate authentic language input and materials, in this case comics, to develop vocabulary (Ehrler), and classroom management practices in the form of organisational aids to reduce transition time between activities (von Memerty).

It is clear that the research, while being undertaken in specific contexts, can contribute to our understanding in several key areas of TEYL, and I thank our graduates for writing up their research so that their insights may be shared with all those teaching any language to young learners.

Happy reading!

Ursula Lanvers

Lecturer in Language Education
Department of Education
University of York
Heslington Road
YO10 5DD
Tel. +44 1904 323440

Can strategies such as focussing on tenses, peer-editing and self-assessment improve the accuracy of tense usage in teens' writing?
Marianne Dark

Introduction
This paper reports on an Action Research (AR) project: firstly, it considers the context, rationale and focus, then it explains the research methods, procedure and timeframe. The data collected is analysed and evaluated and relevant ethical issues and problems highlighted. Finally, the research methods are examined and the whole project is evaluated before a conclusion is reached.

Context
This research was carried out with a class of Young Learners (YLs) aged 12-17 who attended lessons once a week at the private language centre in Malaysia where the researcher taught. The majority qualified as ESL (English as a Second Language, i.e. one which is widely spoken in the environment) learners as they spoke English with their families and friends on a daily basis, whilst others rarely used English outside of lessons. The students' families took a strong interest in education, resulting in the learners understanding its importance and being motivated to do well.

The mother tongue of the learners was either Chinese or Malay, although some considered English as their language of preference.

Rationale
Ellis (1985) states, "L2 learners are likely to manifest correct target language forms on some occasions but deviant forms on other occasions" (p.293). The teacher researcher (TR), who had been teaching in Malaysia for over a decade, noticed the inconsistency of tenses being used accurately amongst YLs and it was not unusual to see a tense used accurately and then inaccurately in the same sentence, such as, "I couldn't reach high enough to get my kite when it's stuck on top of a tree." However, once the mistake was highlighted, it was usually self-corrected. Although this could be due to guesswork, the regularity with which it occurred suggested a latent knowledge of form and usage.

Focus
The language centre's marking policy requires all tense errors to be highlighted by the teacher for the student to self-correct and it was hoped that in addition to this that further emphasis on tense accuracy provided by the AR, might reduce the number of mistakes. Therefore, the YLs worked on the accuracy of their tenses independently of the teacher using peer-editing (PE) before submitting to the teacher for marking, self-assessment (SA) and awareness-raising referred to as Focus on Tenses (FoT). It is generally possible to achieve more with help than it is alone (Fisher, 2005), and PE draws on this premise by giving YLs the opportunity to assist each other in checking their writing before submission.

SA is highly recommended by Harris and McCann (1994) who maintain it "helps learners to think about their own progress and problems and then to find ways of changing, adapting and improving." (p.64). This can help lead to metacognition or 'knowing about knowing' (Brewster, Ellis & Girard, 2002) and the kind of autonomy described by Vygotsky as self-regulation (Cameron, 2001). FoT required YLs to list their tense mistakes and corrections in a table before starting a new piece of writing as an awareness-raising exercise.

Bell (2010) ascertains that some documents are open to interpretation and this project included a certain amount of subjectivity in terms of what constituted a tense mistake. Although largely straightforward (for example, the use of the past simple when the past perfect was required), at other times it was less clear (for example, if 'had went' was written, it was not possible to know whether the student had correctly understood which tense was required and just made a mistake with the form, or whether they lacked understanding altogether). For this project, mistakes were only counted if they represented the wrong choice of tense. If an inaccurate form of the tense was used, such as a spelling mistake, or if the passive voice was required, but not used, then the mistake was not included. Establishing this aided reliability, so another researcher would be able to get similar results from using the same data.

Research methods
Three research methods were used to collect data, to ensure triangulation and as a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. In addition, these methods were considered for their reliability, validity and practicality.

AR journal
An AR journal was written by the TR providing a source of qualitative data. Observations were made about issues which arose during the lesson, as well as the YLs' attitudes towards the project and related comments they had made. The TR's thoughts were noted about the progress of the AR. Although such introspective, mentalistic data is highly subjective, Wallace (1998) maintains it is also a very important source of information.

Analysis of students' work
Quantitative data was provided by the analysis of students' writing. After being marked by the TR using the centre's standard marking scheme, the work was analysed in detail for the purposes of the AR. This consisted of all tense mistakes being counted and recorded in a table, with reference to cycle and order of cycles. This method was chosen due to its practicality; as Bell (2010) maintains, data collection must be practical in terms of its manageability and the researcher's workload. It also offered concrete evidence of the number of tense mistakes. To ensure validity, other errors were not included in the data collection as they fell beyond the focus of the project.

Student questionnaires
The YLs provided feedback via a questionnaire the week before the project began, at the end of each cycle and the week after it had finished. This provided data which could be considered both qualitative and quantitative (Bell, 2010), as well as offering an alternative perspective to the TR's journal.

Procedure and timing

Timescale

This project consisted of three cycles of four weeks each, in addition to the student questionnaires, but first the project was explained to the YLs and a letter of permission was sent to parents to be signed.

On 26.4.14 the Self-Assessment (SA) was piloted with the whole class. It was a new concept for them, so it was important that it was explained thoroughly and that students were supported whilst completing it (Harris & McCann, 1994).

Ellis (1985) warns against "mixing data from different sources" (p.90), and it was thus ensured that all data was collected from pieces of independent creative or expository writing: collaborative writing or comprehension questions were excluded from the study.

Procedure

Lessons were taught as usual from a pre-planned syllabus, and the work on tenses was conducted alongside the continuous writing element. The students were divided at random into three groups, A, B and C, which dictated the order in which they would carry out the cycles.

FoT was a pre-writing activity, in which students' awareness of their mistakes was raised by the students counting all the tense mistakes that had been highlighted by the teacher in their marked work from the previous lesson. Before they began the next piece of work, they recorded the mistakes in a table format. SA was started before the writing and finished once the writing task had been completed, but before submission for marking. It involved answering open-ended questions about the writing task, including setting goals and reflecting on how they were met. PE was completed post-writing by students pairing up, reading each other's work and suggesting changes.

Discussion, analysis and evaluation of data

Data does not become truly useful until it has been analysed and evaluated (Bell, 2010) and Wallace (1998) warns of the importance of doing so "carefully, otherwise there is the danger of simply confirming existing prejudices rather than achieving new insights" (p.39).

AR journal

Comments report that from the start the students and TR were motivated by the project and everyone was eager to see an increase in tense accuracy. This in turn could have helped motivate them to think more carefully before writing and to check work more thoroughly before submission. This was noted in the AR journal on 31.5.14 and 2.8.14, and the opinion is supported by Williams and Burden's (1997) belief that:

> The greater value that individuals attach to the accomplishment of or involvement in an activity, the more highly motivated they will be both to engage in it initially, and later to put sustained effort into succeeding in the activity. (p.125)

On 19.5.14 the journal stated: "XXX and XXX said (unprompted!) that they were both more focussed now with the Self-Assessment which they appreciated."

However, concerns were also noted, such as that FoT was not particularly helpful (19.5.14) and that although it had not been noticed, that it had the potential to affect the YLs' style and creativity (9.8.14).

The AR journal provides heuristic evidence that strategies such as PE and SA helped increase the accuracy of YLs' tenses when writing. It did not provide any conclusive evidence about the helpfulness of FoT, although it suggested that an overall improvement in accuracy could have occurred due to YLs' efforts in that area.

Analysis of student writing
Figure 1 below shows the number of tense mistakes made per piece of work, with an average of 4.5 mistakes per student, per piece of writing.

	Date	GROUP A				GROUP B				GROUP C	
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
CYCLE 1	3.5.14	4	a	a	n.d.	2	6	a	n.d.	n.d.	2
	10.5.14	8	4	1	15	a	23	1	5	a	4
	17.5.14	1	5	4	10	a	3	2	9	a	a
	31.5.14	6	8	11	15	10	11	3	9	3	3
CYCLE 2	21.6.14	3	a	7	2	0	2	2	1	2	5
	5.7.14	6	12	4	7	4	2	a	4	5	4
	19.7.14	3	a	3	5	1	4	1	1	a	2
	2.8.14	4	2	12	6	a	7	a	2	a	2
CYCLE 3	9.8.14	2	0	0	0	0	a	a	1	0	4
	16.8.14	7	0	5	11	6	6	1	5	8	4
	23.8.14	2	6	3	11	a	8	2	15	a	a
	30.8.14	1	1	1	0	2	8	0	1	6	0

Key: a = absent | n.d. = no data | peach = FoT | blue = SA | green = PE

Figure 1: *Table showing number of mistakes made per YL, per piece of work, with reference to cycle and strategy used.*

The statistics were considered from two perspectives: firstly, to see whether the average number of mistakes decreased, increased or stayed the same as the cycles progressed, as it could be assumed that benefits would be accumulative (Figure 2, below).

	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Average number of mistakes per student per cycle	5.98	3.82	3.69

Figure 2: *Student mistakes by cycle*

Secondly the average number of mistakes was recorded according to the strategy (PE, FoT or SA) the YLs were following, to ascertain whether any were more successful than others (Figure 3, below).

	Focus on tenses (FoT)	Self-assessment (SA)	Peer editing (PE)
Average number of mistakes per student per strategy	5.12	5.62	2.75

Figure 3: *Student mistakes by strategy*

PE had the lowest rate of mistakes, supporting Cameron's (2001) claim that PE can help children become better learners. Cycle 3 showed the fewest mistakes: 90% of learners made fewer mistakes in this cycle than during the first cycle and 60% made fewer mistakes in both Cycles 2 and 3 than they had done in Cycle 1, suggesting the effect of the strategies was cumulative.

The above data strongly suggests that strategies such as PE, FoT and SA can help increase the accuracy of tenses in students' writing.

Student questionnaires
100% of the post-cycle questionnaires were completed for evaluation. Cycles 1 and 3 reported ten out of ten students feeling their tenses had improved. After Cycle 2, nine out of ten students felt their tenses had improved, giving an overall average of 96.67%. In general, the reason given for this was the fact that fewer mistakes had been made. Although this was at times inconsistent with the findings from the analysis of students' writing, it did support the overall findings of the project.

Other comments relating to why students felt they had become more accurate with their tenses include:
- the benefits of doing corrections (4 students)
- concentrating more on tenses (3 students)
- checking work repeatedly (1 student)

In response to question 1, which asked specifically what students had been doing to improve, answers referred to:

- reading more
- paying attention to tenses
- checking work
- learning from feedback
- doing corrections
- "practising tenses audibly"
- asking for help
- using a dictionary
- writing

This indicates that YLs had been going beyond the strategies given by the TR and using other techniques to help increase tense accuracy. This could be seen to help substantiate similar theories suggested in the AR journal.

Overall, the three sources of data suggest improved accuracy, despite a number of contradictions. However due to the small scale of the project, the results should be considered illuminative rather than conclusive and further research is recommended.

Ethical issues and problems encountered

The TR was guided by the ethical guidelines and protocols set out by the University of York and by her own sense of ethics (Hopkins, 2008). As the learners concerned were minors, the permission of their parents was sought for their data to be included in the AR. It is also considered good manners, as well as a matter of protocol, to obtain permission from the relevant authority before beginning to conduct research in an institution (Wallace, 1998). It was the TR's responsibility to ensure confidentiality of participants' details and this commitment outlives the duration of the AR.

Hughes, Marjan and Taylor (2013) found that 57% of 75 AR project reports referred to problems of some kind. As noted in the AR journal, this project was affected by student absenteeism, as well as the data of two learners from Group C having to be excluded from the final analysis because one lost his work from the beginning of the project and another withdrew temporarily from the course. This led to uneven group size, thus providing fewer students following one order of AR cycles, with the possibility of reducing the reliability of the findings.

Only three out of ten learners were present for every lesson. One of these left straight after the final cycle and was therefore unable to complete the follow-up questionnaire which was distributed the week after. Data could not be provided for the first piece of writing by three of the YLs as they lost it before it had been duplicated.

Evaluation of research methods

AR journal

On the one hand, the AR journal as a source of data was highly beneficial in recording subjective observations about motivation, students and the TR's feelings towards the project,

the way individual lessons went and any problems which arose, including those of absenteeism.

However, each week it was written before work was marked and only commented on what the TR had observed during class time. It was not always possible for the journal to be written immediately after the lesson and therefore the time lapse arguably could have affected the accuracy of the entry.

Although the AR journal was a very useful part of the AR, its benefit lay in its ability to illuminate other data or record problems or successes; it was not felt to have contributed as much as the student questionnaires or samples of writing as a source of data collection.

Analysis of student writing
Although quantitative data such as this should provide an objective view, it was subject to a number of variables such as uneven group size and high absenteeism which could have affected the data. Similarly, reliability could have been hampered by the students' differing experiences in each lesson. Unless the YLs mentioned it, which would have allowed the TR to note it in her journal, the TR was not always able to account for emotional factors which may have affected the quality of their writing such as events in the students' personal lives, their attitudes towards different tasks or tiredness.

There was no way of accounting for avoidance (Lightbown & Spada, 2006), where a learner plays it safe and only uses language forms they are confident with, which could have led to a higher degree of accuracy being recorded, as YLs avoided tenses they found more difficult.

Some students may have found some writing tasks easier than others and the two shorter pieces (the summaries on 3.5.14 and 9.8.14) yielded a lower than average number of mistakes, as did the creative letter writing on 30.8.14, suggesting this could have been the case.

On occasions, the AR journal highlighted a pressure of time within lessons, which also could have influenced students' accuracy if they had to rush their work or the process of PE. However ethical protocols dictate lessons should not have been disrupted to accommodate the AR, so these issues were often unavoidable.

Student questionnaires
Questions were open to interpretation and, although this may produce valuable unexpected answers, it can also lead to answers which are of limited use. For example, in question two of the End of Cycle Questionnaire, the majority of students cited making fewer mistakes, evidenced by the number highlighted by the TR, as the reason they thought they had improved. Only eleven out of thirty questionnaires included techniques individual students had used.

A number of students' answers lacked detail but the TR was anxious about not influencing the data by giving too much guidance, as students can be prone to using only the examples given.

In retrospect, piloting the questionnaires may have been able to help improve the quality of the students' answers and avoid some of the above-mentioned issues.

Overall evaluation of AR

Despite its problems, the value of this AR was still evident to the TR, who feels the findings could be of interest to other teachers in her institution and beyond. In addition to this, the TR will continue using strategies such as PE, FoT and SA with YLs and implement these practices with new classes. As such strategies allow students to act independently on their latent knowledge, they could also be used for a different focus, such as use of prepositions or word order.

Additional research is needed, however, to extend the study and also to investigate whether such strategies could help students in other classes and settings.

Conclusion

This paper discussed AR that examined whether a group of teenage ESL learners in Malaysia could improve the accuracy of their tense usage in continuous writing by adopting strategies such as SA, FoT and PE. Evidence, although illuminative rather than conclusive, pointed to both a perceived and an actual increase in tense accuracy. This feeds into the motivation cycle of progress leading to higher motivation, which in turn is likely to improve the chance of further progress.

Although it could be argued that the role of AR is a specific one, offering more advantages to the TR and their students than to the wider ELT community, this project can be considered highly successful in both promoting improvement and providing an insight into strategies which help YLs manage their own progress.

References

Bell, J. (2010). *Doing your research* project. (5th edition). Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Brewster, J., Ellis, G. & Girard, D. (2002). *The primary English teacher's guide. (New Edition).* Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

Cameron, L. (2001). *Teaching languages to young learners.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ellis, R. (1985). *Understanding second language acquisition.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fisher, R. (2005). *Teaching children to learn. (2ⁿᵈ Edition).* Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes.

Harris, M. & MᶜCann, P. (1994). *Assessment.* Oxford: Heinemann.

Hopkins, D. (2008). *A teacher's guide to classroom research.* (*4th Edition*). Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Hughes, A. Marjan, H. & Taylor, N. (2013). *Action research in TEYL: Reflections on the global picture from 1996-2010.* York: University of York.

Lightbown, P. & Spada, N. (2006). *How languages are learned.* (*3rd Edition*). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wallace, M. (1998). *Action research for language teachers.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Williams, M. & Burden, R.L. (1997). *Psychology for language teachers.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

About the author

Marianne Dark has been an educator for over 20 years, having worked with young learners in the United Kingdom, Italy and Malaysia. She has a BA (joint honours) in English and History, a PGCE in English (Secondary) and an MA in Teaching English to Young Learners from the University of York. Marianne has taught English to native and non-native speakers of all ages in a variety of contexts, including secondary schools, corporate settings and private institutions. She has been Head teacher of Lorna Whiston in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia since 2010 and is also involved in delivering teacher training to both local and foreign teachers. Her particular area of interest is teaching language through literature.

Email: mariannedark@lornawhiston.com.my

'A little bit panic': Young Learners explore metacognitively the task of L2 formal listening evaluations and document their understanding in portfolios.
Naomi Eichenberger

Introduction
This article reports on a small-scale study with eleven-year-old EFL learners into the use of portfolios to explore and document metacognitive awareness of listening processes.

This research supports a more modern view that children have an awareness of themselves as learners, enabling them to think or express themselves metacognitively (Cross, 2011; Goh, 2010). It was found that the children benefitted from articulating understanding of themselves as listeners. Portfolios provided an effective reflective tool, making some less observable aspects of learning more visible. Some improvements in listening performance were measured. The process of action research became a powerful teacher development tool.

Background
Second language (L2) will be taken to mean any other language than the language mainly learned and spoken. Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal & Tafaghodtari (2006) describe metacognitive awareness as 'self-direction and self-reflection' (p.435). Metacognitive awareness of listening can therefore encompass children's awareness of themselves as listeners and their listening tasks, and their deployment of effective strategies for this (Goh, 2010).

When children listen, they are working very hard. Listening in L2, for children, can be a potentially difficult, interpretative activity, and yet it is nonetheless a central gateway for language input and learning (Field, 2008). Contemporary views of L2 listening suggest that it is a skill that makes complex demands on a listener, that of simultaneously listening for gist (global, top-down processing) and precise meanings (detailed, bottom-up processing), while employing strategies to monitor understanding, often in real-time (Richards, 2008).

Teachers may often be more comfortable focussing on the products of L2 listening rather than entering a dialogue with students about the processes of listening (Goh, 1997; Roche, 2011). This may be because teaching about listening for young learners has been represented by a paucity of literature (Field, 2008). Listening strategies for young learners are rarely targeted specifically in materials (Goh, 2010), yet throughout their education children can be subjected to important tests of their L2 listening abilities, which may have far-reaching effects on the trajectory of their future lives.

When children are expected to demonstrate their L2 listening ability, difficulties can arise as children may need to access other skills in order to satisfy the demands of the task; for example, children may need to handle complex layers of contextual meaning, be able to recognise important and key words in a written question or muster extensive memory function as a prerequisite for success (Field, 2008). Furthermore, L2 listening, especially

during formal evaluations, can require children to employ strategies for decoding and building meaning that they may find challenging, such as guessing and risk taking (Williams & Burden, 1997). Listening evaluations may often be high-stake events for children, and as a result, listening activities, for those assessed, may be associated with stress or fear, which can constrain performance (Field, 2008).

It has been documented in research about reading that building metacognitive awareness of a range of strategies is more effective than coaching single strategies to enhance performance in reading comprehension (Chamot, 2001). It follows that this would be similarly true of listening. Exploring how listening is perceived in portfolios may enable young learners to gain insights into their listening skills and use this to exchange less beneficial strategies for more successful ones particularly in evaluations of their listening performance (Cross, 2011).

Goh (2010) suggests that metacognitive awareness is not dissimilar to other kinds of learning, and advances that it should be treated as a topic within the grasp of teachers and students. It follows that children often learn experientially, often embracing the unknown through experience. Therefore, examining an experience of learning may not be more mysterious or challenging than talking about an experience of a cat or the rain, for example.

A portfolio is understood to be the selected compilation, usually on paper, of children's understanding over time and suited to the highly individualistic nature of children's learning (Council of Europe, 2011). Children, as distinct from older learners, are in a state of 'constant cognitive, social, emotional and physical growth' (McKay, 2006, p.6), so portfolio methods have gained considerable support in the young learner classroom as valuable tools to chart the path and growth of understanding, and to act for each child as a reflective reference (McKay, 2006). Charting growing awareness can be complex, as it may not be directly observable or measurable (Chamot, 2001). Encouraging children, however, to portray their learning in portfolios may particularly be suited to charting metacognitive awareness, as the portfolio can represent the growing understanding as perceived by the learner. Thus, the self-selection of material and the reflection this requires can represent the qualities of growing understanding.

The Study

I reasoned that developing strategies that can support successful L2 listening performance and enhance affective and motivational well-being could benefit children. In a collaborative and participatory approach over a period of three months, I engaged with eleven children in three cycles of action and reflection. The thrust of my research was to use evidence supported by the collected data inductively and collaboratively, in order to illuminate the hypothesis that a portfolio may enhance individual metacognitive awareness of listening that can support performance in formal evaluations. The emerging data was used to influence the subsequent design of further cycles.

The children performed listening tasks, which were monitored by questionnaires and semi-structured discussions, and listening performance was evaluated using standard course materials, which were summative evaluations of comprehension.

The participatory process of action research enabled me to reflect on, challenge and change my teaching behaviour. I reviewed my own beliefs about how children view their listening and learning and gained a deeper understanding of my limitations and identity as a teacher. I found that I developed my understanding the more I empowered my students to articulate their learning processes. A study in children's L2 listening became also a study in me listening to my students.

Participants and Context
The eleven-year-old learners, who had been learning English for four years, were attending a semi-rural state primary school in Switzerland in which English was the second or third language. Their exposure to English was largely confined to language events during their 90 minutes of English lessons per week. The research was conducted in once weekly 30-minute sessions in a group of eleven students. The teaching relationship with me had been established over several years and they had been previously exposed to independent, autonomous group work. The class showed a broad range of abilities and skills.

Method
To monitor emergent awareness, I used an adapted version of a research tool known as the MALQ (Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire), which uses scaled descriptive statements about person, task and strategy awareness (Vandergrift et al., 2006). I simplified and shortened this and used a scaling system from one to six, which was already familiar to the students.
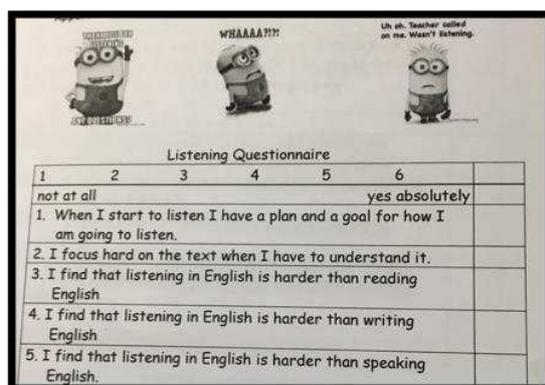
Figure 1: *An extract from the adapted MALQ (Vandergrift et al., 2006) listening questionnaire.*

Formal listening evaluations in standard formats were carried out regularly. The data from these was used quantitatively to cross-check the responses using the adapted MALQ (Vandergrift et al., 2006).

In keeping with the participatory method of research, I also maintained a diary in which I charted my actions and reflections. In this way, I, the researcher became the researched, as

I could increasingly theorise my own teaching identity (Punch & Oancea, 2014). The diary provided complementary material for other data sources charting the changes in my own awareness as well and my observations of the children.

Procedure

The First Cycle: The cycle of questions

I introduced the research project and the portfolio to the children and initiated most of the initial activities that examined listening in L2. The children were encouraged to make decisions on how the portfolio should look and what it should contain (see examples in Figure 2, below). The portfolio thus became the receptacle of awareness and development in a collaborative process (McKay, 2006).
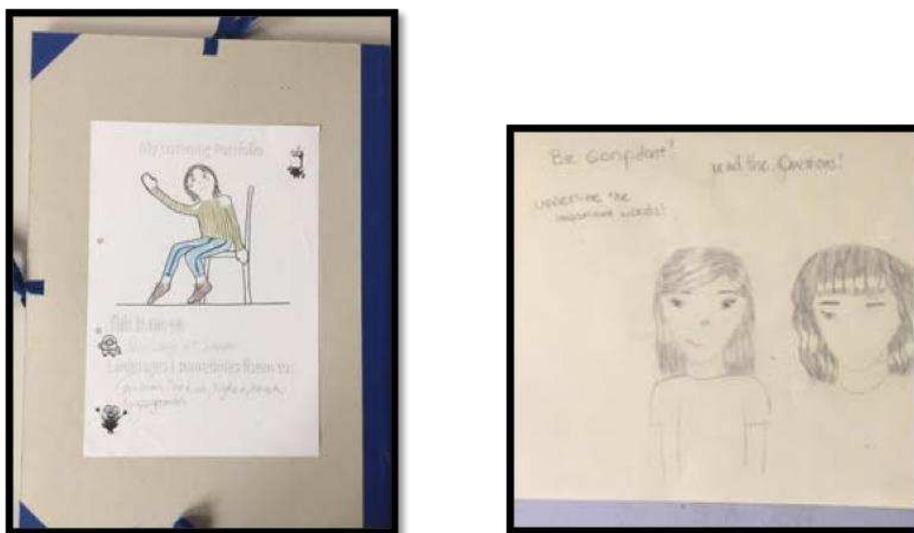
Figure 2: *Samples of portfolio work; 'notes to self: be confident, read the questions, underline the important words'.*

In the portfolios, the children explored their thoughts, such as their struggle to establish meaning when listening to the need to understand gist as well as 'fish out' details. Strategies such as guessing and how to focus, as well as person-knowledge such as the influence of panic (see Figure 3 below) and of not knowing were reflected on. The need for preparedness was also examined, particularly metacognitive strategies such as activating schema and predicting. A baseline of data was established and a listening evaluation enacted, which was used to provide quantitative data.
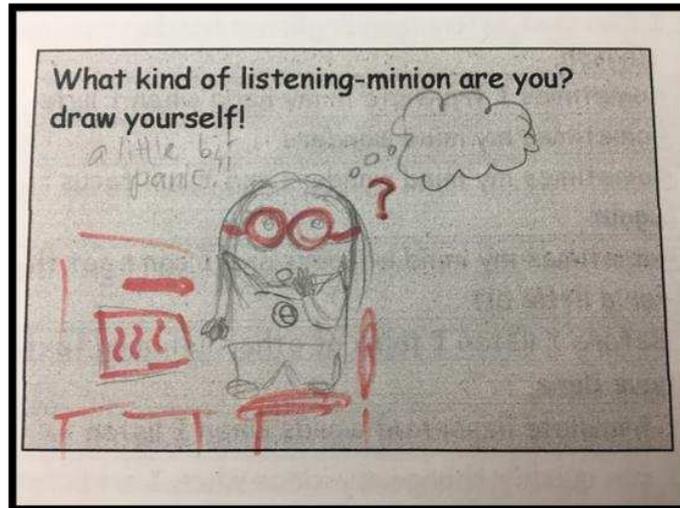
Figure 3: *Sample portfolio: 'A little bit panic'.*

The second cycle: The cycle of listening

After considerable reflection on the surprising breadth of the children's responses and their metacognitive understanding, a second cycle was initiated in which children had an increased voice in how they tackled their listening tasks.

Strategies for listening evaluations were increasingly scrutinised. With this came increased personal understanding, for example the children shared their new awareness of focus and how to remain calm during a formal evaluation. Their findings, their responses to the MALQ (Vandergrift et al., 2006) and their formal evaluations were documented in the portfolio.

I began to listen more carefully to what the children were saying, which caused me to reflect on how deeply the quality of listening depends on the quality of the question asked.

A midline MALQ (Vandergrift et al., 2006) was administered. Formal listening evaluations continued.

The third cycle: The cycle of action

After further reflection, the children increased their interaction with their portfolios. The students articulated and acted on their own strategies, for example they asked for more time to listen to audio texts individually in the computer room. Listening activities became more individualised as students gained more autonomy.

The third cycle, as I reflected on it in my diary, seemed to be concerned more with acting - acting on what was being learned in order to create a learning environment conducive to the needs of the tasks as the children (and not as I) saw them. I profoundly experienced the reciprocal nature of teaching and learning in this collaborative form of research.

A final adapted MALQ (Vandergrift et al., 2006) was administered. Formal evaluations were continued. A final post-task discussion gave the children an opportunity to evaluate their understanding and their portfolio work.

Each session had a short post-task discussion, which I undertook to both guide and observe. My questions to the group were designed to prompt reflection, and I noted the responses the children made. The notes in Figure 4 below are taken from a pre-task discussion at the end of the second cycle and support the findings of the adapted MALQ (Vandergrift et al., 2006).

I ask the following:

Do you remember anything that is in your P/f?
  (long pause) no, no, nothing not really…
What do you remember? *nothing (laughter)*
Has anything in your p/f been useful to you?
  - yes, but I can't say what exactly, I feel better,
  - yes, I think I know more about listening now, that it is hard
  - and it is ok to guess
  - I think I have a better plan

If so what?
I know I can prepare better
What do you think you have learned about yourself
nothing, nothing, nothing….
Listening
how to go about listening comprehensions – share tips then feedback
close your eyes and then open them, if your attention wanders, you will either lose yourself or come back straight away
guess words, it's ok
go straight on if you don't understand
ask if you can
guess meanings and try and check later
translate word by word til you get it
underline important words in the questions
think about what kinds of things might be in the text before it starts.
slow down if you hear numbers

What do you think would be good to put in the p/f?
the above tips

What shall we do next?
write up our tips
practice more
do fewer tests
go to the media room to practice
do our own listening exercises

Figure 4: *Diary Extract 12.1.17 The young learners demonstrate their awareness of task of listening.*

In Figure 4, the children demonstrate their ability to think metacognitively about their learning in a practical and direct way. When asked what they learned about themselves, they answer,

'nothing,' but when asked for practical steps to approach a listening task, the children demonstrate a wide range of understanding of themselves as listeners and the listening task. The students' suggestions such as; 'go straight on if you don't understand, close your eyes, slow down if you hear numbers,' are strategies that became vocalised during the course of the cycles. They suggested to me that Goh (2010) is correct when she suggests that metacognition for children is like any other kind of learning.

Results

In post-task discussions, I noted how the children were able to display an increasingly wide array of strategies for their listening tasks. In my adapted MALQ (Vandergrift et al., 2006) questionnaires, the children recorded some change in their planning behaviour. The children's personal awareness of themselves as listeners was enhanced as the need to rely on translation in real-time was reduced.

There was a described increased confidence in risk-taking. Also reported in their own words in the discussion, as seen in Figure 4 above, the children increased their perception of guessing as an acceptable strategy: 'guess words, it's ok'. The awareness of the need to take risks, often viewed as a strategy adopted by successful learners (Williams & Burden, 1997) became more widespread in the group.

The ability to focus, the awareness of the need for attention and an enhanced ability to avoid confusion were evidenced. The children reported in discussions that the listening text may be more comprehensible than the instructions related to it. Strategies for overcoming this, such as underlining the important words in a question and thinking of and preparing related vocabulary, were discussed.

The highest gain was in the perceived need for mental preparation before evaluations. The results from the adapted MALQ questionnaire (Vandergrift et al., 2006), also demonstrated an increase in the children's awareness of planning and goal setting before listening, as effective task supports. In discussions, the children displayed perception of the need to activate their schema and to plan ahead before the task.

Managing wandering attention was a repeated topic for discussion: 'My mind wanders more than I want it to' (reported statement in my diary 27.10.2016). Noting these difficulties in the portfolio and returning to the problem over time with increased knowledge and common experiences enabled the children to share and act on some of their strategies. Having established that focussing was a widespread problem, the children appeared to become more comfortable with managing it. This engendered an increased awareness of focus, and determination to achieve it. Thinking aloud was deemed a valuable teaching and learning tool (Chamot, 2001). These answers caused me to analyse my teaching and reflect on how my questions and listening might enhance the articulation of the children's learning experiences.

In their responses to the adapted MALQ (Vandergrift et al., 2006), the children's reliance on translation as a strategy decreased, this could be related to the increase in their awareness of guessing as an alternative, supported by more active planning and predicting. However, 'translate word by word til you get it,' was advanced as a strategy in the reported discussion.

20

In a final summarising post-task and semi-structured discussion, the children summarised what they had learned about themselves (person knowledge), about their tests (strategy awareness) and about listening in general (task knowledge). They shared ideas with a partner and then added their findings to the portfolio. As the student in Figure 5 below demonstrates, there was an ability to demonstrate a range of awareness and strategies, that reflects a gained metacognitive awareness in the final discussion.
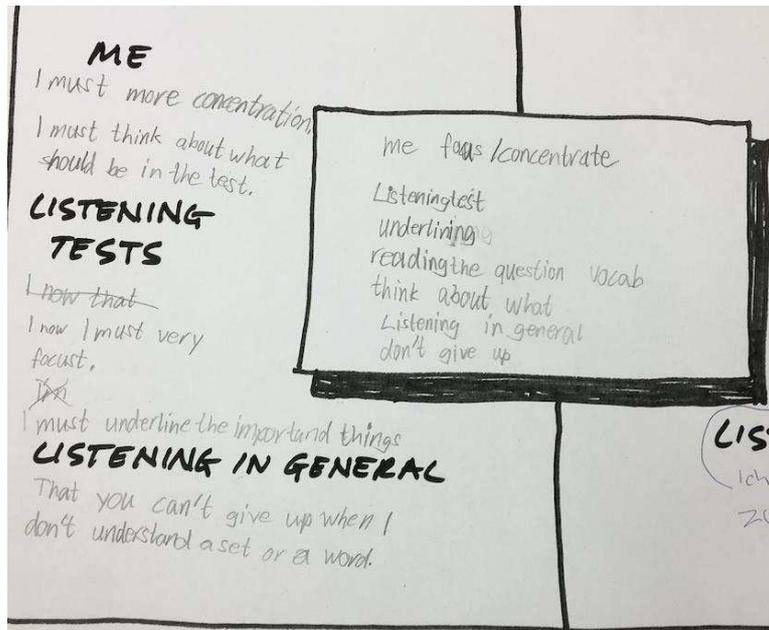
Figure 5: *Student's notes for final semi-structured discussion*

<u>*Performance in Formal Listening Evaluation*</u>
The quantitative data supplied by listening evaluations from the children's course material, showed an increase after the baseline was established. There appeared to be an improvement in performance after the first cycle, which remained high. This would suggest that the children were able to effectively implement strategies useful to them when they needed to demonstrate their understanding. A slight reduction in the final listening evaluations was interesting but unfortunately time-constraints did not allow any further research.
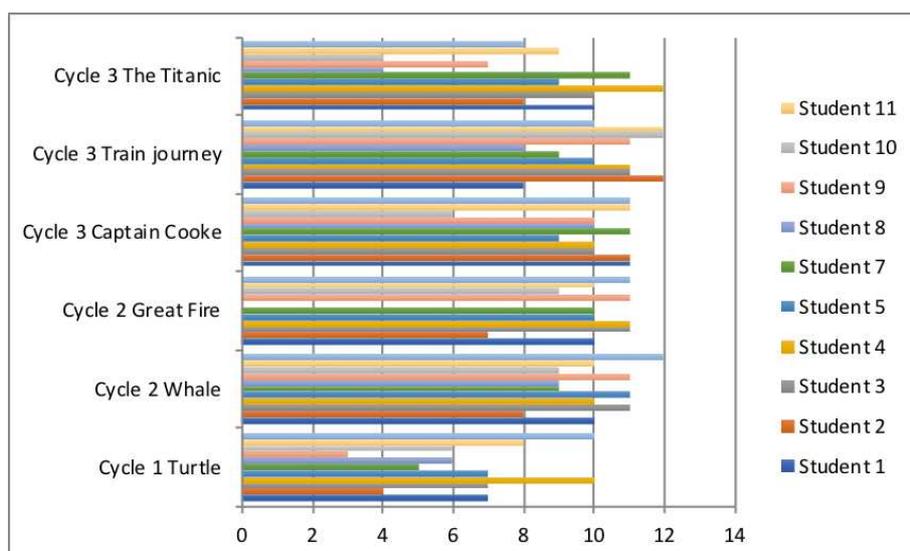
The children's ability to discern true from false statements related to listening texts was measured on a standard scale of 1- 14.

Figure 6: *The children's performance in listening evaluations.*

In a summative evaluation of the portfolio, the children were unanimous in their agreement that they had gained a deeper understanding of themselves as listeners and the listening process. Although there was some ambivalence about the portfolio, most of the young learners felt that their portfolio was of use, and that they had made changes to the ways in which they listen guided by their portfolio.

Professional Development

I gained insights from this research that have enriched the texture of my teaching. By this, I mean that my questioning and listening has become more wide-ranging and subtle. I was surprised by the ease and ability with which the children could discuss their listening processes and the insights that they were able to display. My experience supported Goh's (2010) assertion that teaching about metacognition should be treated as any other form of learning. During the second cycle I became aware how the quality of my teaching depended on the questions I asked, which in turn was related to the quality of my listening. The more carefully I listened, the more profound my learning experience became.

Some of the final realisations in my diary reveal how useful the research project was to my professional development. For example, I became more open about learning processes and strategies and, as I encouraged my students, I too embraced more risk; asking for opinions and acting on them as lessons became more dialogical and student-directed. There was less behind-the-scenes decision-making on my part. I intuited less and openly asked more. Asking children to analyse their responses and insights to their learning may require teachers to make themselves more vulnerable to criticism (Underhill, 1989), but in my experience, this can enhance the breadth of teaching and learning for all involved.

Conclusion

The sample group was small, and also known to me, which could have meant that aspects of validity and reliability may have been compromised by the teacher-pupil relationship. The children may also have had covert reasons to attempt to agree with or please me. I was also responsible for their summative evaluations. However, the children were able to exercise personal control of their portfolios and the content, which would support aspects of the validity of the research. Enlarging the study and making it more longitudinal would deepen the findings, and questions relating to long-term change to learning behaviour might be answered.

The research concurs with Goh (2008) that children can successfully alter learning behaviours through raised metacognitive awareness, guided by tuition and self-directed discovery. The portfolio provided a useful format for development and reflection. The collaborative approach to the research has provided strong support for action research as a powerful personal and professional development tool.

References

Chamot, A. U. (2001). The role of learning strategies in second language acquisition. In M. Breen. *Learner contributions to language learning: New directions in research.* (pp 25-43). London: Routledge.

Council of Europe (2011). *European Language Porfolio.* Retrieved 12.11.2016 from http://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio/concevoir-un-modele-pel

Cross, J. (2011). Metacognitive instruction for helping less-skilled listeners. *ELT Journal. 65* (4), (pp 408-416).

Field, J. (2008). *Listening in the Language Classroom.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Goh, C. (1997). Metacognitive awareness and second language listeners. *ELT Journal. 51* (4), (pp 361 - 374).

Goh, C. (2008). Metacognitive Instruction for Second Language Listening Development. *RELC. 39* (2), (pp 188-213).

Goh, C. (2010). Listening as Process: Learning activities for self-appraisal and self-regulation. In N. Harwood, *English Language Teaching Materials.* (pp 179-206). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McKay, P. (2006). *Assessing Young Language Learners.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Punch, K., & Oancea, A. (2014). *Introduction to Research Methods in Education.* (3rd. Edition). London: Sage.

Richards, J. (2008). *Teaching Listening and Speaking from Theory to Practice.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Roche, M. (2011). Creating a dialogical and critical classroom: reflection and action to improve practice. *Educational Action Research*, *19 (3),* pp. 327-343.

Underhill, A. (1989). Process in Humanistic Education. *ELT Journal. 4*, (pp. 250-260).

Vandergrift, L., Goh, C. C. M., Mareschal, C. J. and Tafaghodtari, M. H. (2006), The Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire: Development and Validation. *Language Learning*, 56: (pp 431–462).

Williams, M., & Burden, R. L. (1997). *Psychology for language teachers.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

About the author
Naomi Eichenberger is a teacher in a state primary school in Switzerland. She has taught children extensively in the UK and Europe and Asia.

Email: naomi.eichenberger@edurichti.ch

To what extent can the reading of short comic strips help 10- to 11-year-old 5th graders in a Swiss state school acquire vocabulary?

Nadine Ehrler

Introduction

This paper presents an Action research (AR) project which aimed to investigate the extent to which the reading of short comic strips can help 5th graders in a Swiss state school acquire vocabulary.

McCloud (as cited in Bakis, 2012) describes *comics* as "juxtaposed and other images in deliberate sequences" (p.17) which intend to convey information or elicit an aesthetic response in a readership. According to Clydesdale (2007), the term *comic* describes the entire spectrum of words plus visual art, including comic strips.

Seville and Richards (as cited in Kurniawan, 2009) argue that *vocabulary acquisition* is an essential need for learning any language. According to Folse (2004), *vocabulary* does not only appear as single words, but in the form of word lists, set or variable phrases, phrasal verbs or even idioms.

Context and Rationale

The AR participants comprised 20 Swiss state school students at primary level. They had been taught English as a Foreign Language (EFL) for 2 years, starting in Grade 3. According to Lightbown and Spada (2013), a *foreign language* is a language which is not regularly used in the community outside an educational institution, which is the case with English in Switzerland. EFL is one subject among a wide variety of others and covers 2 of their 29 lessons per week, each lasting for 45 minutes. Besides reading, writing, listening and speaking, grammar and vocabulary are taught at elementary level with the course book *Messages* (Goodey & Goodey, 2005).

The researcher's own concerns led to the final AR topic. Young learners (YL) in the chosen context seem to be very enthusiastic about vocabulary learning in the beginning of Grade 3, but this motivation appears to decrease in Grade 5, similar to Ghenghesh's (2010) research findings that learners' motivation decreased with age.

Thus, this paper aims to discover whether authentic material read by many pupils outside the classroom (Bakis, 2012) could enhance vocabulary acquisition. The chosen comic strip is well-known by many students and parents, as it is printed in a free Swiss daily newspaper accessible to everyone.

The only person involved in this project was the researcher herself and, therefore, it was intended to be an individual AR project. It also aimed to be a complementary project, not intruding in normal classroom life, such as hindering YL from working on the course material. As it was a small-scale AR project in a single context, influenced by many affective variables

(including the relationship between teacher and students, the topic of comic etc.), its results cannot be generalized, and only qualitative data could be gathered.

Literature Review
Camacho (2015) notes that the comic strip is one of the most enjoyable genres for YL, as it provides a variety of styles and topics, a different register, visual support and it teaches new vocabulary items in a motivating way. Clydesdale (2007) emphasizes that comics usually follow an informal register, such as everyday language, which might be more familiar to the target readers than academic language.

However, Camacho (2015) points out that working with comic strips can be time-consuming, as the availability of appropriate teaching material for EFL learners at elementary level is rather limited. Nevertheless, Jones (2010) and Clydesdale (2007) argue that visuals, including comic strips, present linguistic structures as well as cultural integration and include various functions, such as representation, where visuals repeat and reinforce the content of the text or organization, where coherence is enhanced through visuals.

Williams (as cited in Cimermanová, 2014) regards comic strips as permanent visual components appropriate for primary school level, and Derrick (2008) argues that reading is a major source for vocabulary growth. Reading seems indeed to be an indispensable component in foreign language learning/acquisition, as learners need a certain vocabulary to function outside an educational institution (Folse, 2004); a lack might have a negative impact on their communicative skills (Huckin and Bloch, 1993).

Design and Methodology
Data was collected during a 6-week period, but the initial timing had to be amended, as cycle 1 took longer than planned. The comic strip chosen was *Calvin and Hobbes*, as it is authentic, does not seem too childish for 5th graders and, as Clydesdale (2007) points out, is funny with simple but direct drawings.

The AR started by identifying the initial idea and then continued with fact-finding and analysis with the help of a baseline data questionnaire. The material was then piloted with 5th graders in Liechtenstein. Afterwards, three cycles, including the steps mentioned in Elliott's (1991) AR model, called *spiral of cycles*, followed.

After each cycle of data gathering, the effects were monitored, which helped the researcher reflect on action and carry out necessary changes for the following cycles.

Research Methods and Techniques
Four different data collection tools, namely student questionnaires, AR journal, audio and video recording were used in this AR project in order to allow triangulation.

Questionnaires
Three different student questionnaires for each cycle were designed, as they seemed to allow the development of rich data about the participants' own thoughts and opinions easily

26

and quickly. Multiple choice, open and closed questions were balanced, including the following two closed questions: *How much did you understand from the comic?; Did the comic help you understand some vocabulary words better?;* and the open question: *Give positive and negative comments about the comic.*

Video recording

Video recording was chosen as a second data collection tool. It was accompanied by an observation checklist adapted from Peacock (1997, p. 155). The whole sessions when YL worked with comic strips were recorded. The position of the camera was moved from one corner of the classroom to another in order to record different angles and different YL in more detail.

Audio recording

Audio recording was the third data collection tool. To avoid a massive data overload, only one pair of participants, chosen randomly, was recorded and analysed per cycle. Unlike the video recording, this limitation allowed negotiation of meaning and guessing of vocabulary words to be checked on a small sample of students. Questions 1 and 2 from the observation checklist could be answered with the transcriptions of the audio recordings.

AR journal

A journal in the form of a paper notebook was chosen as a last data collection tool, containing the sections: *Own AR project, Timing, Concerns and Observations, Professional Development and Notes on Literature.* Not only did it help the researcher collect facts about the project quickly and write them down immediately, it also allowed reflection and was used to guide the whole project. It generated mainly subjective data, based on the researcher's feelings.

Ethical Issues

In order to follow appropriate ethical procedures, two informed consent forms were created before the project started: One informed consent form in German and one form in English. The German consent form was distributed to the YLs' parents and the Head of School, and had to be signed before the project could start. All parents as well as the Head of School agreed on letting the researcher use data from their children for the project. The English consent form was sent to the university where the researcher did her Master's degree.

Furthermore, the researcher followed the principle of confidentiality, so all the participants' names were anonymised for the AR project, but still known by the researcher. In addition, the project was not intrusive, as the researcher could carry out the AR project, but simultaneously follow the English program set by the school.

AR Procedure
Prior to cycles 1- 3
The data from a baseline questionnaire served as the basis for the design of the student questionnaires. All questions, either in the baseline data questionnaire or in the student questionnaires, could be filled out in English or in the students' native language, German.

A pilot cycle conducted with pupils from Liechtenstein equivalent to 5th graders in Switzerland then aimed to help identify problems in timing and of formulation in the student questionnaires or work sheets, which could be changed for the three cycles. It also intended to improve validity, as a different teacher worked with and checked through the material and filled out a feedback form. As Peacock (1997) notes, piloting helps detect "unforeseen practical problems" (p.147). The pilot class found comic strip 1 too short and the formulation of certain questions was too confusing for them, for example. Nevertheless, the pilot class enjoyed the comic strip layout and the Power Point Presentation (PPP), as well as working with comics in general.

Cycle 1

Cycle 1 involved an introduction to the topic *comics* in general and was, therefore, slightly different from the following two cycles. To actively engage the students, the researcher let the YL first brainstorm and then write down all the comics they knew on the blackboard. YL were also guided through an introduction about *comics* and *Calvin and Hobbes*.

The researcher then asked the children if they knew some vocabulary words from the comic strip written on the blackboard. The children raised their hands if they did, with eyes closed to avoid being influenced by classmates, and the researcher wrote down the number of students knowing the words. This number was to be compared with the number at the end of the lesson. Afterwards, the comic strip was read out loud in plenary and then in pairs, and YL had to solve a teacher-generated information gap worksheet to elicit active use of new vocabulary.

At the end of the lesson, the teacher looked back to the written number on the blackboard and asked students again about the words they knew after having worked with the comic strip. After the lesson, YL had to fill out a student questionnaire about the whole lesson.

Cycle 2

The procedure with writing the vocabulary words to be acquired on the blackboard and reading the comic strip out loud in plenary/pairs was maintained.

However, with the help of the observation checklist as well as the audio data, the researcher detected that some participants had had problems in connecting words and pictures/concepts. Therefore, as a first change, the researcher underlined specific vocabulary words in the comic and added arrows from the underlined words to the corresponding comic strip pictures. This small change aimed to help YL see the link between text and pictures much more clearly. In addition, the pictures from the comic were added to the gap-fill exercise.

Questionnaire 1 was also reviewed and adapted, as some questions were too general to be valid for cycles 2 and 3, for instance the question *Do you like reading in English?*

Cycle 3

The procedures with the blackboard and the underlining of words, the arrows and the pictures next to the gaps were kept as YL seemed to have been supported by these actions. However, YL were now required to individually choose 5-6 vocabulary words from all the words in the comic strip. The researcher aimed to hand over responsibility to the YL with this

small change, as learners could focus on the words they were most interested in acquiring. As some YL described cycle 2 as slightly boring, this change may have increased the exercise's popularity and allowed individual work at their own language level, which might have prevented YL from losing focus.

Data Analysis & Key Findings

Student questionnaires

The first question in questionnaire 1, _Give positive and negative comment about the comic,_ aimed to generate general information about YLs' opinion about vocabulary acquisition and the specific comic, and to identify possible changes required for cycle 2. Peacock (1997) also notes that some comics can be too difficult for YL. However, after having implemented the change in cycle 2, negative comments decreased to only three, and in cycle 3, only one negative comment was made. It seems as if the more used to the procedure YL got, the more positive the comic strip evaluation turned out. Thus, YL might depend on familiarity for successful acquisition.

From cycle 1 to cycle 3, students' vocabulary comprehension seemed to increase, as can be seen in Figure 1 below with the question _How much did you understand_? The changes may indeed have helped YL understand the vocabulary of the comic strip much better, as the number of students understanding _a lot_ (namely 10, 12 and 13 YL) increased from one cycle to another, and arrows and pictures might have supported this understanding.

Amount	Almost all	A lot	Half of it	A little	Almost nothing
Cycle 1	4	10	3	1	0
Cycle 2	6	12	0	1	0
Cycle 3	6	13	2	1	0

Figure 1: _How much did you understand?_

The question _Did the comic help you understand some vocabulary words better?_ generated similar findings, as seen in Figure 2. The majority of the participants concluded that the reading of comic strips helped them understand vocabulary better. However, there appeared to be a slight decrease in this number from cycle 2 to cycle 3. This may have a connection to the topic of the comic strip, as comic strip 2 seemed to be the most popular one. Thus, YL might benefit the most when topics in general are relevant to their lives (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

Answer	YES	NO	N/A
Cycle 1	15	2	1
Cycle 2	19	0	0
Cycle 3	16	1	3

Figure 2: *Did the comic help you understand some vocabulary words better?*

The video recording was consulted in order to answer questions 2-5 from the observation checklist.

There seems to be a slight correlation between the data from the student questionnaires and the observation sheet, as 16 YL liked comic strip 2 the most and the researcher also marked this comic strip with the highest score (seen in Figure 3). It appears that the YL liked it more because they understood it better. Nevertheless, the fact that students got used to the procedure might also have contributed to their enjoyment and the comic strip's popularity.

Question	Comic strip 1	Comic strip 2	Comic strip 3
1 (negotiation)	5	2	4
2 (guessing)	3	4	4-5
3 (enjoying)	5	5	5
4 (engagement)	4	5	4
5 (appropriacy)	3	5	5
SCORE	12	19	18-19

Figure 3: *Audio and video data.*

Audio data did not contribute enough to the AR question, as the data did not give information about the students' comprehension of vocabulary words, but only about negotiation of meaning and guessing of words.

<u>AR journal</u>

The section of the AR journal *Concerns and Observations* in particular helped the researcher recognize the necessary changes. These applied changes might indeed have helped YL acquire vocabulary better, as the number of vocabulary words acquired rose after every single cycle. The more obvious the connection between words and the concept was for the YL, the more actively they were involved in the learning process. All these variables may have raised the amount of vocabulary words acquired by the students and might have motivated them to keep on learning.

Evaluation of Research Methods and Techniques

Model

The *spiral of cycles* (Elliott, 1991) model appeared to be a suitable and efficient model, as the changes implemented helped the researcher develop and reflect on her current educational practice. In addition, it helped her think about her professional practice critically and helped her improve her professional action in the classroom immediately.

Questionnaires

The student questionnaires seemed to be practical, valid and reliable, as they allowed quick and easy data gathering and always kept the same procedure, focusing on the research question. If YL had problems understanding some questions, they could be solved on the spot by the researcher. Validity seemed to be increased as well, as the student questionnaires and worksheets were piloted with an equivalent group beforehand.

The researcher checked the number of acquired words before and after every cycle through an informal assessment. Nevertheless, YL were only requested to raise their hands if they knew the words and this was not verified explicitly. Therefore, this procedure seems to be somewhat subjective and unreliable. In addition, the three different comic strips did not always include the same amount of vocabulary to be acquired. In a future AR project, a more formal assessment would need to be implemented and the amount of words equalized.

AR Journal

The AR journal allowed the researcher to make notes about the project, literature, concerns or timing. It seemed to have been a practical tool as it was handy and easy to use, but not always reliable, as affective variables, such as the researcher's subjective interpretation, the timing of the lesson or her personal mood, may have influenced the findings.

Video recording

The video data, accompanied by an observation checklist, allowed another different perspective on the topic and appeared to be valid and reliable. A myriad of data could be gathered and consulted again, even after the lesson. However, this procedure was time-consuming and slightly impractical. Although the checklist appeared to increase objectivity, it may still remain a subjective tool, as it was only an individual observation. Nevertheless, it did not seem to be intrusive for the YL, as they seemed to forget about the recording during the lessons.

Audio recording

The audio recording provided more specific information on the YLs' language used during the pair work and may be reliable, as it can be listened to on a later occasion. It did not, however, contribute to the research question enough, and was not, therefore, a very valid tool for this particular research.

Evaluation of the AR

The experience of conducting small-scale AR contributed to the researcher's professional development, as t allowed working with a topic of concern, but one that was enjoyable for YL at the same time. Nevertheless, some problems were encountered.

Problems encountered

The choosing of appropriate comic strips was a very time-consuming task, just as Camacho (2015) argued, as, although there exists a wide variety of print and digital comic strips on the market, materials for EFL learners in primary school are either expensive or not fully authentic. Nevertheless, this fact allowed the researcher to gather a myriad of helpful material for future practice.

The dual role of being a teacher and a researcher at the same time was also a challenge not to be underestimated. Being the class teacher meant to support the students. Observations were done simultaneously, and the video and audio recording equipment had to be installed too. Thus, practicality suffered slightly and this would need to be changed in a further AR project. However, as data was triangulated with different research tools, reliability may have been increased, as the procedure was repeatable and the layout of the worksheets and questionnaires was maintained. Another problem was the limited amount of research time as only one lesson per week could be dedicated to the research.

Some small changes would be implemented in a future AR project. First, a collaborative AR might help increase reliability, validity and practicality. YL could also be more actively involved in choosing or writing their own comic strips. Eventually, the research could be carried out over a longer period of time, allowing the time-frame needed to be significantly enlarged.

Conclusion

This small-scale project focused on using comic strips to help young learners acquire vocabulary. The findings of this paper arguably need to be interpreted with caution, as they are by no means conclusive and data is rather subjective. It seems, however, that short comic strips may indeed help YL acquire vocabulary. Seeing the YLs' enthusiasm when reading the comic strips and presenting them with an enjoyable strategy for vocabulary acquisition was the most fruitful outcome of the project. Furthermore, the participants seemed to understand more vocabulary after every cycle and the changes implemented appeared to increase coherence of visuals, just as Liu (as cited in Clydesdale, 2007) pointed out. Furthermore, the higher the comic's suitability was, the better the vocabulary seemed to stick in the participants' heads. The great majority of the learners seemed to like working with comics and appeared to remember the newly acquired vocabulary, even at the end of the AR project.

A general comment from one participant summarizes the whole project briefly: *Combining learning vocabulary with reading comics is as if we do not have to learn, as it is fun for everyone.*

References

Bakis, M. (2012). *The graphic novel classroom*. New York: First Skyhorse.

Camacho, J.M. (2015). *Why using authentc written materials in the ESL classroom? Reasons and examples*. Retrieved December 26, 2017, from http://www.quadernsdigitals.net/index.php?accionMenu=hemeroteca.DescargaArticuloIU.descarga&tipo=PDF&articulo_id=10940

Cimermanová, I. (2014). Using comics with novice EFL readers to develop reading literacy. *Procedia- Social and Behavioural Sciences. 174*, 2452-2459.

Clydesdale, J. (2007). *A bridge to another world: using comics in the second language classroom.* Calgary: University of Calgary.

Derrick, J. (2008). Using comics with ESL/EFL Students. *The Internet TESL Journal, 14* (7). Retrieved October 3, 2017, from http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Derrick-UsingComics.html

Elliott, J. (1991). *Action research for educational change.* Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Folse, K.S. (2004). *Vocabulary myths*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

Ghenghesh, P. (2010). The motivation of L2 learners: Does it decrease with age? *English Language Teaching, 3* (1), 128-141.

Goodey, N. and Goodey, D. (2005). *Messages 1, Student's book.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Huckin, T. and Bloch, J. (1993). Strategies for inferring word meaning in context: A cognitive model. In T. Huckin, M. Haynes & J. Coady (Eds.). *Second language reading and vocabulary acquisition* (pp. 1153-1178). Norwood: Ablex.

Jones, E. (2010). The use of comic book style reading material in an EFL extensive reading program: A look at the changes in attitude and motivation to read in English in a Japanese university. *Language Education in Asia. 1* (1), 228-241.

Kurniawan, E. (2009). *Improving vocabulary ability by using comic*. Retrieved September 27, 2017, from http://publikasi.uniska-kediri.ac.id/data/cendekia/vol7no2juni2009/cendekia-vol7no2juni2009-06.%20Erwin%20Hari%20K.pdf

Lightbown, P. and Spada, N. (2013). *How languages are learned. (*4th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Peacock, M. (1997). The effect of authentic materials on the motivation of EFL learners. *ELTJ, 51* (2), 144-156.

About the author

Nadine has worked as a primary school teacher in Switzerland since 2004 and has taught English as a Foreign Language since 2005. Since graduating from the University of York with an MA in "Teaching English to Young Learners" in 2016, she has worked as a lecturer of English Didactics at the Schwyz University for Teacher Education (Pädagogische Hochschule Schwyz). She is now involved in teacher training and development, as a new syllabus (Lehrplan 21) is being implemented in the German speaking part of Switzerland, also influencing how foreign languages are taught at primary and secondary level.

Email: nadine.ehrler@phsz.ch

To what extent can self-assessment help 13-year-old learners of English in a school in Liechtenstein develop fluency while performing oral activities?
Pamela Lendi-Duran Sanchez

Introduction
This article offers a description of an action research project (AR) which investigated whether self-assessment might help 13-year-olds develop their fluency in oral activities. Self-assessment is defined as an assessment type in which learners can determine how satisfactory their performance was and if they have made any progress (Harris & McCann, 1994). On the other hand, fluency includes diverse features (Fillmore, 2000) such as speed, grammatical and phonological accuracy (Nation & Newton, 2009), coherence, discourse appropriacy and creativity (Fillmore, 2000). Thus, this article intends to shed some light on connections between the self-assessments carried out by the students during the AR and the development of their fluency.

AR Context
The AR was carried out in a school in Liechtenstein between September 2015 and March 2016. A total of 11 mixed-gender ESL students participated in the project. The students had three English lessons of 40 minutes per week and had been learning English since the age of 9, approximately. An interview with a previous teacher showed that students were already acquainted with self-assessment before the AR took place.

Rationale
The researcher estimated that self-assessment could help students improve their fluency based on the premise that 13-year-old students find themselves in the formal-operational stage which may allow them to reflect on their own thinking (Piaget, as cited in Moshman, 2009). Thus, self-assessment could help learners enhance their learning strategies by reflecting on their strengths and weaknesses (Williams & Burden, 1997). Furthermore, Jang (2014) believes that YLs' self-assessment is done more validly if they are asked to self-assess after classroom tasks have been done and if the self-assessment is contextualised. Thus, the use of speaking activities in pairs or trios which focused on negotiation of meaning and recalled previously learned vocabulary and structures (Nation & Newton, 2009) was envisaged as a technique which could possibly shed some light on the researched topic.

Design and Ethics
The AR consisted of a reconnaissance stage, a piloting stage and three research cycles, as proposed by Elliot (1991). To ensure objectivity, reliability and triangulation, a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches was selected (Wallace, 1998). Moreover, the AR was complementary and illuminative in its nature (Wallace, 1998). The analysis of the data, which led to reflection and amendment, was done after the piloting and cycles were each carried out.

The code of ethics was respected by completing a formal ethical issues audit form for the University of York, by addressing a letter of consent in which the AR was explained to the school principal, teachers and students, and finally by giving students pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity.

Data Collection Tools

Various data collection techniques were implemented. First, in order to collect baseline data, students were asked to complete a questionnaire which aimed at gathering information about their beliefs about fluency and language learning. Open and closed questions were used to obtain qualitative and quantitative data. The questionnaire was written in German to assure reliability and validity. Secondly, two semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed; one with the previous teacher to collect data for the baseline and the other with the current teacher to triangulate the final results.

Moreover, students completed four self-assessment sheets, which were given to them after they had performed the speaking activities. Open and closed questions, and tables were used to get quantitative and qualitative data on the students' reflections after their speaking performance. The speaking activities were recorded and transcribed. Figure 1 shows a sample of the self-assessment form for cycle 1.

Make a ☒ in the box that best describes your performance.

I can ...	Very well	well	Not so well
talk about other people.			

I can say this because I ...	I agree	I disagree
used a lot of words.		
talked about all the people.		
could interact with my classmate.		
I didn't make any grammar mistakes.		
I pronounced all words correctly.		
could communicate with my classmate even if i made mistakes		
I didn't hesitate (mmmm, ehhh)		

That is why I think I deserve to get this grade:

1   2   3   4   5   6

I think I've improved because ...

_____

_____

For the next speaking activity my goal is to improve in the following aspect(s):

_____

_____

Figure 1: *Self-assessment form for cycle 1.*

Furthermore, the researcher designed a speaking performance assessment sheet which included six fluency-related aspects: vocabulary, pronunciation, coherence, hesitation, grammar and overall performance. The assessment sheet provided guidance for the researcher to analyse the students' speaking performance after each speaking activity. Figures 2 and 3 show the speaking criteria used to give marks for the six aspects of fluency assessed by the researcher after the YLs' performance.

Vocabulary:

4: the student shows a wide range of vocabulary to deal with the task.

3: the student's vocabulary is sufficiently enough to deal with the task.

2: the student uses a limited range of vocabulary.

1: the student's vocabulary is very poor.

Pronunciation:

4: the student's pronunciation is very clear.

3: the student's pronunciation is mostly clear but he/she makes mistakes in very common words at times.

2: Pronunciation is sometimes very difficult to understand.

1: Very poor pronunciation very much like student's mother tongue.

Coherence: does the student join his/her thoughts in coherent phrases to convey his/her message?

4: the student expresses his/her ideas coherently communicating straightforwardly.

3: the student expresses his/her ideas coherently despite occasional insecurity.

2: the student expresses his/her ideas coherently at times, some other times he/she seems to lose track making it hard to follow his/her message.

1: the student ideas are difficult to follow since they do not seem be to be linked together.

Figure 2: *Speaking criteria for researcher's assessment: Vocabulary, Pronunciation and Coherence.*

Hesitation:

4: the student makes short pauses which don't affect the conveying of the message.

3: the student makes pauses which occasionally affect the conveying of the message.

2: the student makes many pauses which affect the conveying of his/her message.

1: the student's speech is mostly unintelligible. A lot of hesitation.

Grammar:

4: the student shows good command of grammar structures even though he/she still makes some mistakes, these do not impede comprehension.

3: the students has a fair command of grammar structures; however, he/she still makes errors in some basic structures.

2: the student's speech is characterized by the use of very simple grammatical structures and the mistakes he/she makes can impede comprehension occasionally.

1: the student's accuracy is limited to memorized expressions or he/she makes many mistakes which impede comprehension.

Overall: is the student able to communicate his/her ideas?

4: the student's ideas come across.

3: the student's ideas are understood with some difficulties.

2: the student's ideas are understood only by speakers of his/her mother language.

1: the student's ideas are mostly expressed in his/her mother language not in English.

Figure 3: *Speaking criteria for researcher's assessment: Hesitation, Grammar and Overall.*

Finally, an AR journal was kept to note down any thoughts, reflections, students' comments or to-do lists throughout the AR.

Procedure

Reconnaissance

The reconnaissance stage done before the piloting showed that students had self-assessed their work in other school subjects and after a presentation in English. The previous teacher used English most of the time during the lessons leaving German to deal with behavioural

problems and individual feedback sessions. Moreover, after analysing the students' answers to the questionnaire, it was clear that most of the students believed that pronunciation is the most important factor in language mastery, followed by grammar. None rated hesitation and correctness as important. In addition, 8 students thought pair or group speaking activities were the ones which helped the most in their language learning. Students also ranked the four skills from most to least important as follows: speaking, reading, listening and writing.

Piloting
Students were given a handout with pictures and were asked to talk about things they like or do not like doing. They were allowed to ask questions if the task was not clear. The self-assessment form was completed after they finished the speaking activity.

The analysis of the data showed that the use of German in the self-assessment form provided clarity. However, the researcher saw the necessity of being consistent when she provided scaffolding. Finally, students identified ways of improving their future performance in cycle 1. See Figure 4 below.

Name of student	
Elliot	I want to learn more words.
Glen	I want to speak clearer and to stop stuttering.
Andrew	I don't want to make long pauses.
Mariah	I want to speak better and clearer.
Amy	I want to speak louder and clearer.
Teo	I want to be more fluent.
Sean	I want to speak clearly.
Jean	I want to learn words before the next speaking activity takes place and to make questions whenever I don't know a word.
Wayne	I could learn more words.
Ferris	I don't want to stutter.
Trevis	I want to pronounce words better and not to start stuttering.

Figure 4: *Students' ideas on how to improve for cycle 1.*

Cycle 1
Giving students individual or group preparation time before their speaking performance could improve their fluency (Crookes, as cited in Nation & Newton, 2009). Thus, students prepared for the task by revising vocabulary and talking to their partners. The handout given this time showed a picture of a family and a family tree below it. They were asked to describe the people and their family connections. The self-assessment form was identical to the one used in the piloting stage.

The analysis of the speaking criteria sheets showed that the students' fluency suffered a slight drop in all aspects. Interestingly, the students also graded themselves with lower marks in their self-assessment forms. However, their comments regarding their improvements in this stage and their goals for cycle 2 showed that only Andrew thought he did not improve. See Figure 5 below.

Name of student	I think I've improved because...	For the next speaking activity...
Elliot	I spoke more fluently.	I want to make less pauses.
Glen	I spoke more fluently.	I want to learn more.
Andrew	I don't think I've improved.	I want to speak better.
Mariah	Absent!	Absent!
Amy	I had time to prepare.	I want to ask questions in a better way.
Teo	I always study.	I want to speak more fluently.
Sean	Absent!	Absent!
Jean	Didn't answered anything!	Didn't answered anything!
Wayne	I can speak a bit better now.	I want to learn more words.
Ferris	Didn't answered anything!	I want to be able to say more things and to describe them better.
Trevis	I've paid more attention in class.	I don't want to make such long pauses.

Figure 5: *Students' opinions about cycle 1 and ideas on how to improve for cycle 2.*

On the other hand, it was clear that one student was implementing his own strategies to improve his vocabulary. This could be asserted since he stated this goal in the piloting stage and the researcher recorded this information in the AR journal (see Figure 6).
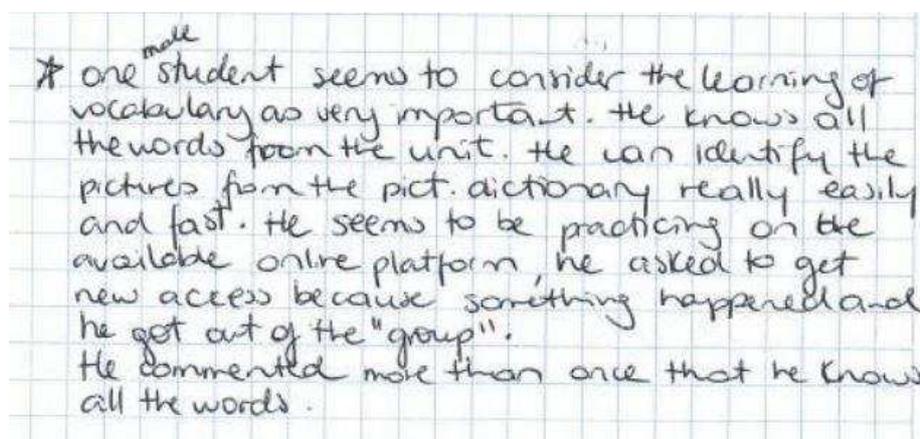

Figure 6: *AR journal excerpt.*

Cycle 2
The learning materials the students used introduced New York City. So, a handout with a picture from New York's skyline was given to the students for this cycle. Learners were given preparation time before they talked. However, in this cycle the researcher stayed in the room to help students in case they had any questions. The students were allowed to use their own materials to prepare, which included their booklet, notebook and handouts. The learners were asked to complete the handout with their thoughts to create a mind map which could be used while they spoke. These changes were made based on the researcher's reflections in the AR journal.

Students listened to their recordings after the speaking performances, and after that they completed the self-assessment forms. The researcher believed this could help them be more specific when completing the form especially when it came to writing about their ideas on how and what to improve for the last cycle.

The analysis of data showed that 4 students' fluency improved, while 2 remained the same, 3 had a slight drop, 2 learners were absent and the mark of one student could not be compared with cycle 1 because he was absent. According to the data provided in the self-assessment, those students who got higher marks believed that the interaction with their partner and being less hesitant played a decisive role in their performance. Interestingly, the marks given to 2 students coincided with their own marks, which might be a sign of higher reliability of these results. However, the other marks given by the researcher for the rest of the class were not identical to the grades in the YLs' self-assessment. The other 2 students who got higher marks did not think their performance was good enough, which may confirm Nicholls' similar belief (as cited by Jang, 2014) about students' self-assessment, that occurs when they find themselves in the transitional stage from elementary to secondary school, characterised by their harsher performance perceptions.

The students' goals for their last speaking activity are presented below in Figure 7.

Name of student	For the next speaking activity ...
Elliot	I want to speak clearly and to make less pauses.
Glen	I want to speak more clearly and fluently.
Andrew	I want to speak better.
Mariah	Absent.
Amy	I don't want to be sick.
Teo	I want to prepare myself better, study more.
Sean	I want to speak a bit clearer.
Jean	I want to speak louder.
Wayne	I want to practice with the words.
Ferris	I want to talk more and to use the correct words.
Trevis	I want to speak better and more.

Figure 7: *Students' opinions about cycle 2 and ideas on what to improve in cycle 3.*

Cycle 3

Nation and Newton (2009) believe that using tasks that resemble past learning experiences could contribute to the learners' development of fluency since students feel familiarised with the tasks and topics and, therefore, with the vocabulary and structures needed to perform them. Consequently, for this cycle students were asked to give directions using a map of New York City since they had already done similar tasks in class before they performed this speaking activity. As done in cycles 1 and 2, the students were allowed to prepare their talk and to use the picture dictionary for the unit.

The analysis of the data collected with the speaking performance assessment sheets shows a drop in the performance of 7 students. Students made use of German words at times and

needed to repeat or reformulate phrases in order to complete the task. Thus, it might be inferred that negotiation of meaning played a more important role than accuracy. The self-assessment form shows that 9 students believed that they could get their ideas across even if they made mistakes.

Since this was the last AR cycle, the second page of the self-assessment form was modified in order to give students more time to reflect on their performance in cycle 3 and the previous cycles too. Their comments in the pilot and cycles 1 and 2 were presented to them to help them to reflect on their learning progress. Figure 8 below shows their reflections.

Name of student	Have you improved? If yes, how? If not, why?
Elliot	I don't think so, I didn't study enough.
Glen	Yes, I can speak clearer now.
Andrew	Yes, I've improved in speaking and writing.
Mariah	Yes, I've improved in speaking.
Amy	Yes, but it isn't enough.
Teo	Yes, I speak more fluently and I study more.
Sean	Yes, I made almost no long pauses.
Jean	I don't know.
Wayne	Yes, I invested time in learning words and I studied.
Ferris	Yes, because I don't stutter so much anymore and because I speak clearer.
Trevis	Yes, because I enjoy it and when one enjoys something one learns too.

Figure 8: *Students' opinions about their performance throughout the cycles.*

Moreover, the analysis of the self-assessment shows that all students believed they deserved at least the lowest pass mark, which in Liechtenstein is a 4. Those who gave themselves a mark of 4 believed they were just good enough to get a pass mark but they were not accurate enough to get a higher mark. Those who gave themselves a 5 were happy with their performance but commented that it was not perfect, enough to give themselves a 6. Only one student gave himself a 6 and justified his mark by saying that while he completed the activity he felt as if he was in New York, listening with attention and using only English.

Final Analysis
After the analysis of the data in all stages of the AR, it can be said that there is not enough evidence to claim that self-assessment might have helped the students improve their fluency. Moreover, none of the learners identified the self-assessment as having an influence in their improvement.

Learners were able to point out which areas they wanted to work on, but the researcher did not find any signs of students working towards reaching their goals except for Jean, who practised a lot using a vocabulary-training online platform.

The interview with the current teacher provided insightful data on the effects of the speaking activities rather than of the self-assessment. She believed the students were more motivated

and were less afraid of making mistakes, which could have contributed to the improvement of their English in general. In fact, some students also commented on the last self-assessment form that they felt motivated and had fun doing the speaking activities. Some were even disappointed because they wanted to continue doing more.

Consequently, the AR appeared to shed some light on the importance of offering learners the opportunity to work in small groups doing speaking activities, while also giving them the chance to reflect on their performance. However, the researcher sees the need to offer learners training on how to develop strategies to work towards their goals and to give them feedback on their performance and progress after the self-assessment time.

Evaluation of the data collection tools
It appears that the use of a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods and techniques was successful in terms of triangulation. However, it might be unavoidable to get subjective answers from the participants at times, which could have affected the reliability of the AR.

The recorder seemed to have been an unobtrusive tool, which appeared to have ensured validity and practicality. Furthermore, the criteria used in the researcher's assessment sheet were used throughout the AR, which could have also helped ensure reliability, validity and practicality. However, it is important to remember that the small scale on which this AR took place might make it difficult to replicate the results obtained, which could also affect its reliability.

Finally, the ethical code was respected at all times, which is always a crucial factor for the researcher.

Problems encountered
The time spent by the researcher with the learners was limited to one lesson of 40 minutes per week, which might have been a hindrance for the researcher in providing learners with guidance on how to work towards their goals. The absence of some students on the days in which the speaking activities were done is also seen as having had some impact on the results obtained.

Finally, the lesson offered to the researcher to do the speaking activities was always the first lesson on a Thursday morning from 7:40 to 9:10. This could also have some influence on the students' performance since some of them had difficulties concentrating and were tired at times.

Conclusion
It can be concluded that the evidence gathered with the data collection techniques was not enough to prove any direct connection between self-assessment and the improvement of fluency. However, offering these learners the chance to practice the language in speaking activities and to self-assess their work seemed to be important for their general language learning and motivation.

References

Elliot, J. (1991). *Action research for educational change*. Guildford: Open University Press.

Fillmore, C. (2000). On fluency. In H. Riggenbach (Ed.). *Perspectives on fluency*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Harris, M. and McCann, P. (1994). *Handbooks for the English classroom: Assessment*. Oxford: Heinemann Publishers.

Jang, E. (2014). *Focus on assessment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Moshman, D. (2009). Adolescence. In U. Müller, J. Carpendale & L. Smith (Eds.). *The Cambridge Companion to Piaget*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nation, I. and Newton, J. (2009). *Teaching ESL/EFL listening and speaking*. New York: Routledge.

Wallace, M. (1998). *Action research for language teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Williams, M. and Burden, R. L. (1997). *Psychology for Language Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

About the author

Pamela has been an English and Spanish teacher in Costa Rica, Switzerland and Liechtenstein. She has also been working as a materials designer and teacher trainer for the Verein Neues Lernen in Liechtenstein. Her work focuses on designing English learning materials for secondary schools which develop teenagers' speaking skills.

Email: pameduran@yahoo.com

To what extent does the use of organisational aids reduce transition times in an EFL class of 13- to 14-year-olds in Liechtenstein?

Renée von Memerty

Introduction

This paper reports on an action research project undertaken in 2016 as part of a Master's programme. Its aim was to determine the extent to which the use of organisational aids reduced time spent on transitions in an English Foreign Language (EFL) classroom of 13 to 14 year-olds. Reducing transition times not only increases time available for activities but has also been shown to improve student behaviour (Kounin, 2006). Organisational aids may be one way in which to affect improvements in this area.

Setting the scene

The setting for this action research was a high school in the German-speaking country of Liechtenstein. The students that were the focus of the research were 13 to 14 years of age and in their second year of high school.

The decision to focus on classroom management was made as it was perceived as an area of teaching that can have significant impact on both efficiency and enjoyment in teaching and learning. The fact that classroom management and discipline are often cited as a reason for teachers leaving the profession (Bracher, 2014) gave further impetus to the research.

Terms

The term *transitions* can be used in education to refer to major changes, such as moving from primary school to high school, as well as the smaller scale activity-to-activity transitions (Ylvisaker, Hibbard & Feeney, 2006). Arlin (1979) defines a transition in the classroom as the 'teacher-initiated directive to students to end one activity and to start another' (p.42). These classroom transitions can also be seen as consisting of such actions as: setting up an activity, the collection and distribution of materials required for an activity, as well as any organisational and activity-related instructions (Nolting, 2014). Activity-to-activity transitions were the focus of investigation and following Nolting's (2014) definition, transitions have been sub-divided and classified according to whether they pertain to setting up, collection/distribution, explanation/instruction or organisation.

Organisational aids in this particular context refer to the board notes, Overhead Projector (OHP) or Visualiser documents that were used in class to complement student organisation.

Design Rationale

Rationale for area under investigation

The importance of transitions

The advantages of minimising the length of transitions appear to be twofold. Firstly, time spent on transitions can be seen as time that takes away from learning, therefore minimising transition times increases the time available for learning (McLeod, Fisher, & Hoover, 2003). The second advantage to reducing transition times lies in possible behavioural improvements.

Kounin (as cited in Nolting, 2014) identified four dimensions of effective classroom management: overlapping, withitness, smoothness and momentum and group focus. The dimension 'smoothness and momentum' is of interest here as it deals with the management of transitions (Nolting, 2014). Kounin (2006) discovered that student misbehaviour could be directly linked to the inefficient management of transitions.

Inefficient management includes actions Kounin (2006) names jerkiness (lack of smoothness and momentum), being stimulus bound (letting other things distract from the activity at hand), dangling (starting an activity only to leave it hanging), truncation (starting an activity, leaving it hanging and not resuming it) and flip-flopping (starting something but then returning to a previous activity), among others. Minimising these flawed management actions and reducing time spent on inefficient transitions promotes the smoothness and flow that encourages disciplined behaviour (Kounin, 2006).

Organisational aids as management and learning tools

The advantages of using organisational aids can be seen from both a teacher as well as student perspective. From a teacher perspective, spending time on planning is a well-known strategy for effective classroom management (Nolting, 2014; Pedota, 2007). McLeod et al (2003) also stress that organisation is a key factor of smooth transitions.

From a student perspective, Scrivener (2012) argues in favour of the open display of a lesson plan as it gives students more explicit access to the process of learning and a better understanding of the procedural approaches. Scrivener (2012) also suggests that referencing and annotating the posted lesson plan are useful strategies as they bring the students' attention to the plan and have the added benefit of allowing the teacher to discreetly check on time, page numbers, materials etc.

Advance Organisers

An optional facet of posted organisational aids is that they could offer a more abstract overview of the lesson topic that relates what the students know to what they need know (Williams & Burden, 1997). This aspect is known as an advance organiser and its purpose is to help the learner organise and interpret the new knowledge that is about to be presented (Hattie, 2009). An advance organiser differs from a lesson plan in that it is more generalised and abstract (Williams & Burden, 1997). It also appears that advance organisers have more

47

favourable effects on learning when they are in a non-written form (Hattie, 2009). This would imply that an organisational aid that combines a visual advance organiser format with a written lesson plan format may offer better results.

The hypothesis was, then, that having a lesson plan that was frequently referred to in full view, with all the information needed to complete smooth transitions may minimise the inefficient transition management actions outlined by Kounin (2006), such as dangling, truncating, flip-flopping etc., thereby reducing transitions in general. A further hypothesis, which was implemented at a later stage in the action research cycle, was that if organisational aids include some visual representation of the topic that relates what students already know to the lesson objectives, this may have further benefits for organisation.

Research Strategy and Methods

This action research was carried out over a period of three months and consisted of three cycles which alternated between the research and comparison group.

Data collection methods

Four data collection tools were used: an inventory in statement format for the students to complete, an observation chart for the class teacher to complete, a video recording from which transition times could later be recorded and a research journal in which personal reflective notes were kept.

Each cycle consisted of a lesson in which an organisational aid was used, with a maximum of three activities taking place. A video recording was made in order to calculate the transition times at a later stage. During the lesson the class teacher completed the observation chart, while at the end of the lesson the students completed the inventory. If time permitted after class, the class teacher gave some feedback, and notes of this were made in the research journal, along with further thoughts on the lesson.

Observation chart

The purpose of the observation chart was to involve an external observer, that is the class teacher, in order to obtain an alternative point of view on the use of organisational aids in the classroom and strengthen the reliability of the data through triangulation.

The observation sheet included two sections: A tally section for quantitative data where the frequency of references and annotations to the organisational aid could be noted, and a more qualitative section where comments could be made by the observer on the objectives and outcomes. These objectives and outcomes were entitled board notes, the use of references and annotations, verbal signposting (which can be considered a verbal form of the organisational aid) and transitions in general. The use of a partly structured form of observation was chosen to direct the focus onto relevant evidence rather than assessment, as recommended by Wallace (1998).

Inventory

Inventories consist of statements and a range of responses to choose from (similar to a Likert scale, which commonly ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree) and enables the researcher to gauge the participants' reaction to the statement (Elliot, 1991). The aim of the inventory was to judge the effectiveness of the research hypothesis from the students' point of view.

The six statements were:

1. The notes on the board helped me.
2. I understood the instructions for the activities.
3. I knew who I had to work with for the different activities.
4. I knew what I needed and where I could get it.
5. I had enough time for the activities.
6. I could start quickly on the activities without wasting much time.

The students had the choice between:
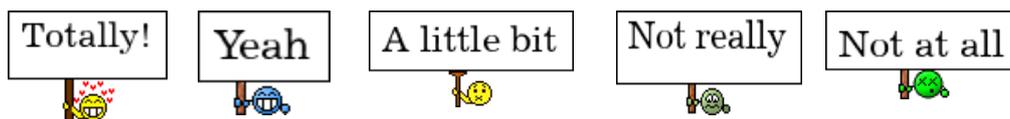
Video Recording

A video recorder was positioned at the back of the class, giving a general overview of the lessons. The video recording was viewed at a later stage with transition times then being noted. The transitions were further categorised according to their type: set up, collection/distribution of materials, explanation/instruction for the activity and organisational procedures, using Nolting's (2014) definition of these categories as a guideline. These times were then added up to give a lesson total for transition time and a lesson total for activity time.

Journal

The journal was used for personal reflection as well as note-taking during informal feedback with the class teachers. The journal consisted of approximately 40 loose-leaf pages with handwritten notes that could later be analysed and scanned into the digital format. The journal was used more intensely during the development of the initial idea for the action research, and to a lesser extent for reflection on possible changes to implement over the cycles. The notes taken during informal conversations with colleagues, together with readings, however, served as an important source of ideas for changes to be made from one cycle to the next.

<u>*Development of the organisational aid over the Action Research cycles*</u>

The appearance of the organisational aid in cycle 1 was a simple lesson plan written up on the blackboard. However, it became apparent with the limited time available between lessons, that a format that could be prepared in advance, such as a transparency on the Overhead projector (OHP) or a document for the Visualiser (a type of projector), would be more suitable.

The appearance of the organisational aid in cycle 2 was a simple word document printed on a transparency for the OHP. The class teacher suggested several changes that could improve its effectiveness and at this point the use of a Visualiser, which projects an image of paper documents that the teacher is working with, was recommended in place of the OHP.

The final cycle saw a number of actions being implemented, which aligns with what Elliot (1991) related in his experience with action research in education: that a cluster of actions is likely to be implemented as opposed to single, minor changes. The organisational aid became a Visualiser document, included a number of visual improvements such as font size and colour, as well as the inclusion of an image that embodied or represented the objective of the lesson in some way. The decision to include an image was based on two factors: it made the lesson plan more appealing, and using an image could be linked to the theory behind advance organizers which was outlined previously.

Discussion, analysis and evaluation

Discussion of findings

Inventory

The inventory results did not seem to show any particular pattern through the cycles as there were many variations across the cycles as well as between the research and comparison group.

Observation chart

The quantitative section of the observation chart tallied 10 references, annotations and additions in cycle 1, three in cycle 2 and six in cycle 3. The qualitative section of the observation chart consisted in part of factual comments such as descriptions of the annotations made, as well as more qualitative comments on transition management indicating when something was considered well done, or possible areas of improvement. The comparison class teacher, for example, made the observation in the pilot lesson and in cycle 1 that the researcher should wait for silence before beginning an explanation for the next activity. She later remarked (in cycle 3) that the students were quieter and that the transitions were clearer.

Transition times

The baseline transition times for the research group amounted to 23 minutes and 5 seconds of class time. The research group went on to show a decrease in transition time of over 6

minutes, with a total of 16 minutes and 56 seconds recorded in cycle 1. Cycle 2 increased slightly by roughly 3 minutes to 19 minutes and 39 seconds, and the final cycle dropped again to a total of 11 minutes and 9 seconds. The lowest recorded transition time for a lesson was thus recorded in the final cycle. The comparison group showed similar but slightly lower transition times than the research group.

The division of transition times by the categories: organisation, explanation and instruction, set up and pack up, collection and distribution revealed that the majority of the time was spent on explanation and instruction.

Journal

While the majority of the journal entries were devoted to the development of the Action Research idea, notes taken during informal feedback played an important role.

Critical analysis and discussion

Although the final cycle did see a reduction in transition times of over 11 minutes from the baseline values, it is probable that caution should be taken in attributing all the improvements to the use of organisational aids. While cycle 1's transition times also decreased in relation to the baseline values, cycle 2's values increased in relation to cycle 1's values. In addition, the reconnaissance data showed lower transition times to the baseline.

The irregularity of the transition times would seem to be in part a result of the lesson plan itself and any additional organisational requirements that may be present. Cycle 2, for instance, required over 3 minutes of organisational procedures and longer set-up and pack-up times. Thus, transition times were likely to vary according to activity requirements such as length of explanations or time needed to set up, as well as whether there were any organisational matters that need to be attended to during the lesson.

The variety in lesson structure and activity requirements also seems to be reflected in the inventory results. The inventories seemed to show no trends or patterns that could directly link student perception of the organisational aids and transitions to the reduction in transition times. Furthermore, the diversity of values shown by the research group when compared with the comparison group indicate that group composition and group dynamics may have unique effects on the responses to the inventory statements.

The extent to which the transition times decreased overall, however, does seem to speak at least partly in favour of organisational aids. The comparison class teacher's comments on how the transitions seemed clearer and the observation that the students were quieter, were possible indications of improvements in classroom management. In addition, from the more personal perspective of the teacher/researcher, the organisational aid seemed to be a fairly effective planning and in-class organisational tool that could help prevent inefficient management actions, such as dangling and truncation, and improve time management, as was noted in the journal.

From a student perspective, however, links between the quantitative data collected through the inventory and the transition times were not very strong. The inventory results showed a diversity of responses across cycles and between the research and comparison groups, and no real positive trends. This lack of validation could have a number of reasons: the small number of participants, design flaws in the inventory or the complex nature of the issue itself.

The hypothesis that using an advance organiser would aid student organisation does not appear to be confirmed, but no specific statement to address this aspect was included in the inventory. The emphasis in Hattie's (2009) overview of research on the subject of advance organisers does however generally relate to long-term retention of knowledge and not lesson level organisation. Thus, while an advance organiser may help students retain the lesson content in the long-term, its applicability to lesson plan organisation that reduces transitions may be limited.

Evaluation

It thus seemed that while organisational aids may be of some use to teachers who prefer or need external support for their time and organisational management, the uniqueness of each lesson as well as that of each class of students seemed to infer an inherent variability in transition times. This inherent variability decreases the reliability of the research project as it would be difficult to generalise or replicate it.

What also became apparent in the later stages of the research was that the design of the inventory was a point of weakness in the data. Analysing the results from the inventory proved difficult and inconclusive, and a qualitative aspect may have provided a more illuminative understanding of the students' perception of transitions. Another area of improvement in the research design could have been to ensure a more consistent referencing of the organisational aids during the lessons.

Conclusion

The action research project reported on here attempted to determine the extent to which the use of organisational aids reduced time spent on transitions in an EFL classroom of 13- to 14-year olds. The rationale for this research was that improving transitions has been shown to improve student behaviour, and organisational aids may be one way in which to affect improvements in this area.

In summary, despite a reduction in transition times over the course of the research period, it could not be directly attributed to the use of organisational aids. In particular, data from the students' perspective could establish no direct link, although there was partial support from the external observers' and researcher's perspectives.

Despite the inconclusiveness of the research, the illuminative quality of action research had valuable repercussions for professional development, allowing for a clearer understanding of

the importance of transitions, the usefulness of organisation aids and the complexity of classroom management.

References

Arlin, M. (1979). Teacher transitions can disrupt time flow in classrooms. *American Educational Research Journal*, 16(1), 42–56.

Bracher, K. (2014, April 6). NZZ am Sonntag: Jeder zweite Lehrer steigt nach fünf Jahren aus. Retrieved May 22, 2016, from http://www.nzz.ch/nzzas/nzz-am-sonntag/jeder-zweite-lehrer-steigt-nach-fuenf-jahren-aus-1.18278578

Elliot, J. (1991). *Action research for educational change*. Milton-Keynes: McGraw-Hill Education

Hattie, J. A. C. (2009). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement.* (1st Edition). London: Routledge.

Kounin, J. S. (2006). *Techniken der Klassenführung: Standardwerke aus Psychologie und Pädagogik. Reprints*. Münster: Waxmann.

McLeod, J., Fisher, J., & Hoover, G. (2003). *Key elements of classroom management: Managing time and space, student behavior, and instructional strategies*. Alexandria: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development (ASCD). Retrieved from http://site.ebrary.com/lib/alltitles/docDetail.action?docID=10047461

Nolting, H.-P. (2014). *Störungen in der Schulklasse: Ein Leitfaden zur Vorbeugung und Konfliktlösung* (12th ed.). Beltz.

Pedota, P. (2007). Strategies for effective classroom management in the secondary setting. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*. 80(4), 163–168.

Scrivener, J. (2012). *Classroom management techniques* (1st Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wallace, M. J. (1998). *Action research for language teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Williams, M., & Burden, R. L. (1997). *Psychology for language teachers: A social constructivist approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ylvisaker, M., Hibbard, M., & Feeney, T. (2006). *LearNet*. Retrieved February 1, 2016, from www.projectlearnet.org

About the author

Renée, originally South African, has been working with teenagers in Liechtenstein since the year 2001 and finds them much more interesting than adults. She specialises in learning language through action, games and creativity. She is also involved in material development and teacher training at the Verein Neues Lernen. Since completing her Masters in Teaching English to Young Learners at the University of York her teaching interests have tended towards the implementation of cooperative and transformational learning in secondary education and optimising digital possibilities in the school environment.

Email: vonmemerty.renee@schulen.li