Personal learning from the CELTA: an auto-ethnography approach

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Talk Structure

- auto-ethnography
- my reflections on the CELTA
- implications of my research
- Q&A
What is auto-ethnography?

- Utilises **autobiographical** and **ethnographical** approaches by linking the researcher’s experiences with those of the culture/group they are studying.
- Impartiality is abandoned; the researcher’s **reflections** are the basis of research.
- ‘auto-ethnography is one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher’s influence on research’ (Ellis et al., 2010, p.3)
Methodological tools of auto-ethnography

1. Thick description (Geertz, 1973); interpreting rather than simply observing

2. Reflection (Dewey, 1910); question everything, take nothing for granted

3. Linking the above to relevant literature

‘weave of story and theory’ (Spry, 2001, p.713)
Auto-ethnography and the CELTA

- Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
- I kept a daily journal throughout my CELTA training
- I used thick description and reflection to record my experiences
- Further reflection through weekly e-mail discussion with dissertation supervisor
- Initially focused on various topics but focus narrowed to teaching approaches and ideology only
- Content analysis of journal generated data for discussion
We had an input session about the communicative approach; the attitude of trainer one seemed to be that a communicative approach with reduced teacher authority is the best approach, regardless of the context. He/she acknowledged that some cultures prefer teacher authority but said learners are likely to prefer communicative teaching; I feel this is a little simplistic and imposes a Western way of thinking onto other cultures.
Auto-ethnography and the CELTA

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Auto-ethnography and the CELTA

- I was both sole participant and researcher
- My daily journal was my data
- The discussion linking my experiences to literature constituted the findings of the research
Findings: my reflections on the CELTA

- The CELTA prioritises teaching approach over learner needs

- Trainees not shown how to adapt teaching methods or respond to learner needs

- ‘Outdated’ techniques:
  - L1 avoidance
  - Pronunciation drilling
  - Assumption that communicative approaches work everywhere
I also witnessed how effective translation can be whilst observing a trainee’s teaching practice; some learners had not fully understood a new vocabulary item and the trainee had been unable to clarify it for them. After the end of the lesson, a trainee who shared these learners’ L1 provided the translation for them and they immediately understood.
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Research Implications

1. Trainees need to be made better aware of differing contexts and learners they’re likely to encounter
   - Could be achieved through input sessions outlining educational beliefs and practices around the world

2. Show trainees how to be selective with teaching methods
   - Could be achieved through advice on how methods can be adapted, perhaps drawn from trainers’ own teaching experiences

3. Freshening up of CELTA syllabus in regards to L1 use
Conclusions

- Auto-ethnography allows us to reflect on our own experiences in a structured way
- After reflecting on my experiences I concluded that the CELTA prioritises teaching approach over learner needs, and some of its teaching techniques could be considered outdated
- Changes could be made to better prepare trainees for varied teaching contexts, and help given to choose methods appropriately
- Syllabus could better incorporate the L1
Thank you for listening

Questions?
References


If you'd like to read my dissertation in full, please e-mail me your request at bethany-g-c@hotmail.com