

Editorial: Research methodologies as framing the study of English/literacy teaching and learning

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The discussion of “what counts as research” is endless and endlessly partisan. The use of research “evidence” is equally as polemical and frequently political, especially when such evidence is cited to justify yet another change in government policy. Ironically, educational research is arguably of relatively low status (one has only to consider how little funding it has] when compared to “pure science”. Although educational research does not deserve this relatively low status, there is no question that it is an exceptionally problematic field in which to become a researcher. Although large-scale research is occasionally undertaken, partly through lack of funding, but also through the local nature of educational activity, much research is small-scale and undertaken by individuals or small groups; many scientific teams are huge in comparison.

Of course, this complexity also makes it a truly fascinating and dynamic environment in which to be an active researcher. Educational research is also of vital importance and can influence governments leading to changes of policy that affect the lives of every child and every teacher in a country. The National Literacy Strategy in England (1997-2011) is a perfect example of a policy that claimed to be informed and based on educational research but was actually a highly political strategy, which selected from research what suited its ambitions (see Goodwyn & Fuller, 20011, for a detailed account).

This issue and the next one of ETPC are focused on what we mean by research in the field of English and Literacy Education and how we explain and justify its many methodologies. The next volume also considers the nature of becoming a researcher in the field and the relationship of teachers of the “subject” in schools and settings to both the research literature and to becoming an active researcher.

Whilst choice of research method may often represent a very necessary and pragmatic decision based on time and resources available, it will also often reflect a philosophical underpinning that resonates strongly with a researcher’s standpoint as to what counts as research. As research methodologies offer competing views of the world and provide contrasting lenses through which to generate, analyse and then make sense of findings, choice of methodological framing is therefore of interest. For this special edition of *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, we have selected papers that consider the ways that different methodological approaches constrain or liberate research in English/literacy and contribute in meaningful ways to our understanding of teaching and learning. The key aim of this issue is to stimulate debate around the role of epistemological positioning in English/literacy research by

seeking papers that consider its value as well as those that critique its limitations or constraints

Overall, the papers across the two issues cover a range of focal points, the first being highly theoretical and conceptual, arguing about the ways in which English/literacy teaching and learning is positioned as a field by the sorts of approaches to research that are valued and by whom they are valued. That is, what kinds of research are valued by different groups, and what does that do to constrain the range of options for researchers who need to be funded, but who also wish to be heard, and to become influential voices in debate? Another focal point is about *doing research*, and how particular methodological decisions enhanced or inhibited both the process of inquiry and the outcomes that could be claimed in specific research projects.

A third area is the way in which research methods shape the teaching profession as consumers of research. Do the research methodologies selected position English/literacy teachers in certain kinds of ways? How does the construction of English teachers as a group influence the professional formation of practitioners – how do early-career or pre-service teachers of English/literacy begin to engage with research (either as consumers or as activist professionals), which is shaped by the kind of teacher that they *want* to become, or alternatively *do* become? How does the research of teachers – practitioner research or action research – contribute to the study of English/literacy teaching and learning and the debate about research and methodology more broadly? Finally, what of the narratives of emergent researchers who are prepared to reflect on dilemmas/problematics encountered in the course of doctoral study or other research.

Inevitably, with such a rich field, the articles which have been selected can only illuminate some of the multifarious aspects of research that might have been included. It is notable that the quality and range of contributions was so excellent that the editorial team asked for two volumes in order to try and maximise the range we could offer to our readers. This first volume offers a good overview of some of the key conceptual issues in English and Literacy research.

The article by Gabrielle Cliff-Hodges (UK) discusses interconnections between research methodology and English pedagogy. The study was designed to deepen understandings about adolescent reading, using particular English teaching approaches to generate data, mindful that ideas about what constitutes the act of reading are often wide-ranging. The study focused on work with young people who regularly read for a variety of purposes and pleasures, in order to discover what construction of reading might be brought into relief by those who count reading as a habitual pursuit amongst the many other activities with which they engage. Readers' representations of reading and readership are also analysed from multiple theoretical perspectives: sociocultural, spatial and historical. The article focuses specifically on some of the implications of undertaking multi-faceted research in English classrooms, raising questions about how certain kinds of English pedagogy combined with case study research may lead to different constructions of young people as readers.

Christina Davidson (Australia) examines ethnomethodology in order to consider its particular yet under-used perspective within literacy research. Initially, the article outlines ethnomethodology, including its theoretical position and central concepts

such as indexicality and reflexivity. Then, selected studies are used to illustrate the application of the methodology and related research methods to the examination of literacy and literacy instruction. This section delineates a number of constraints on the application of the methodology. These include respecification of topic as practical accomplishment, bracketing by researchers of *a priori* interests and background information to produce unmotivated looking, and meticulous analytic attention to locally produced social phenomenon often only made visible in fine details of transcripts. Ethnomethodology's contribution is discussed then in light of criticisms concerning the overly restricted nature of the methodology, or some versions of it. It is concluded that despite ongoing critique, the application of ethnomethodology to literacy research may reveal taken-for-granted ways literacy lessons are accomplished, lead to the description and explication of social actions that constitute literacy instruction, and enhance existing theoretical models of literacy learning and teaching.

In the article by Wen-Chuan Lin (Taiwan), questions are raised about how traditional, cognitive-oriented theories of English language acquisition tend to employ experimental modes of inquiry and neglect social, cultural and historical contexts. The paper reviews the theoretical debate over methodology by examining ontological, epistemological and methodological controversies around cognitive-oriented theories. The findings of the study suggest that non-experimental modes of inquiry that employ multiple methods for multi-layered analysis are productive and appropriate. The author argues that socio-cultural theoretical lenses and methodological instruments may liberate research in English language studies and broaden our understanding of English learning and teaching.

Yvonne Reed (South Africa) explores issues around distance learning, an increasingly important part of all forms of pedagogy. Internationally, guidelines for distance education advise the use of feedback from students in designing and redesigning materials. Her own attempt to elicit such feedback are explored as *an instructive failure*. The author therefore drew on theorisations of pedagogy, mediation and subjectivity and on international and local (South African) conceptualisations of a knowledge base for teacher education, together with Halliday's work in systemic functional linguistics and Kress and van Leeuwen's work in social semiotics, to devise a framework for what she has termed a critical pedagogic analysis of distance learning materials, arguing that such an analysis can assist materials designers and evaluators to uncover the subject positions constituted for readers of distance learning materials and that this is a worthwhile project because particular subject positions may affect readers' "investment" in their studies and in improving their classroom practice. After giving a brief account of the "feedback failure" and what she learned from it, she outlines each "element" of the analytic framework and illustrates its use with examples from an analysis of three sets of South African teacher education materials.

Building on the principles of philosophical hermeneutics (Ricoeur, 1984), Dawan Coombs (US) uses the concept of narrative to explain how individuals interpret their experiences and make sense of seemingly disconnected elements of life by turning them into the stories. Narrative identities represent the coming together of the stories individuals tell, as well as those told about them by collectivities and by others (Bruner, 1986; Kearney, 2002). She argues that these ideas prove particularly relevant

to literacy studies, because identity influences how individuals make sense of their experiences, including their interactions with texts (McCarthy & Moje, 2000). Using the methodological framework of philosophical hermeneutics, the article discusses how examining elements that make up stories, what Ricoeur (1984) called pre-understandings, offer insights into the narrative identities of adolescent struggling readers. By examining stories shared by one student from a larger multiple-case study, the author demonstrates the way students emplot and interpret their narratives, ultimately acting as agents in the telling of their narratives and the authoring of their identities. Preliminary examinations of these narratives indicate extensive dialogues between adolescents and the pre-understandings they use to construct their narratives about themselves as readers. The significance of others – particularly teachers – becomes evident in the construction of students' narrative identities.

Gemma Moss's article considers the role of research in disentangling an increasingly complex relationship between literacy policy and practice as it is emerging in different local and national contexts. What are the tools and methodologies that have been used to track this relationship over time? Where should they best focus attention now? In answering these questions the paper considers three different kinds of research perspectives and starting points for enquiry, these are:

- *Policy evaluation*: The use of a range of quantitative research tools to feed policy decision-making by tracking the impact on pupil performance of different kinds of pedagogic or policy change (OECD, 2010)
- *Co-construction and policy translation*: This has for some time been a central preoccupation in policy sociology, which has used small-scale and context-specific research to test the limits to the control over complex social fields that policy exercises from afar (Ball, 1994). Agentic re-framings of policy at the local level stand as evidence for the potential to challenge, mitigate or re-order such impositions.
- *Ethnographies of policy time and space*: Ethnographic research tools have long been used to document community literacy practices, and in training their lens on the classroom have sought to focus on the potential dissonance between community and schooled practices. It is rarer to find such research tools deployed to explore the broader policy landscape. In the light of debate within the field, the article examines how ethnographic research tools might be refined to study how policy from afar reshapes literacy practices in the here and now. (Brandt and Clinton, 2002)

The paper by Amanda Thein and her Pittsburgh teacher-researcher colleagues (USA) details a teacher-researcher effort to investigate effective instructional practices for teaching multicultural literature through a collaborative, iterative process of design, enactment and critique relative to empirically driven principles. The paper outlines how the research began with a distillation of recent scholarship on multicultural literature response into a set of design principles for instructional practice. The paper reports how the study was grounded in the paradigm of design-based research; the specific methods were inspired by the Japanese professional development practice of lesson study. In the paper, each of the teachers reflects on his or her experiences of working with the shared design principles, collaborating with others on lesson plans for his or her classroom, and learning from the experiences of other teachers in other school contexts. In synthesising the teachers' experiences, this paper argues that both

lesson study and collaborative design-based research across teaching contexts hold promise as methods for studying English pedagogy and for professional development of teachers.

The classroom narrative from Adam Loretto and James Chisholm (US) describes the transformation of one beginning English/language arts (ELA) teacher's perspective and practice as the teacher enacted multimodal inquiry activities that were the focus of both traditional and action research projects. Drawing on field notes, transcripts of classroom discourse, and student-produced artifacts, the authors illustrate the ways in which the teacher's practice integrated the language of research with the language of practice in ELA as the teacher sought to incorporate multimodal inquiry activities into his daily curriculum. The process of collaboration that is described in this narrative represents one way in which beginning teachers and teacher educators might overcome what Mary Kennedy (1999) has called the "problem of enactment" – the challenge that many beginning teachers have translating into their own classroom practice pedagogical perspectives encountered in the research highlighted in teacher education programs. The article recounts how one teacher worked through the problem of enactment over two semesters of research and practice as he negotiated theoretical principles and practical dilemmas related to multimodal inquiry during a 12th-grade literature course in the eastern United States. The paper closes with implications for the integration of research and practice in ELA.

As is customary, this issue of *English Teaching: Practice and Critique* contains a number of articles in dialogue, that is, articles accepted for publication that are not focused on the theme of the issue. In the first of these, Hilary Janks (South Africa) takes issue, with Gunther Kress and others, who have recently questioned the relevance of critical literacy. In arguing a case for relevance, Janks draws on contemporary material from the media, showing how critical literacy enables a forward-looking and transformative mode of critique. She concludes her article by offering textual materials that teachers can utilise with students in a critical literacy classroom.

A second article in dialogue comes from Ching-Mei Cheng (Taiwan) whose focus is the increased emphasis in the fields of both EFL and ESL on intercultural competence (IC). The focus of her study is EFL teachers' beliefs about IC and their effects on classroom practices. Her findings suggest that teachers' understandings of IC did not play a part in their self-reported pedagogical practices, and that cultural self-awareness did not appear in their teaching. Lecturing occupied most of the class time, and discussion with students was rare. Unsurprisingly, textbooks dominated the practice of participating teachers. Paradoxically, most participating EFL teachers acknowledged the significance of intercultural learning in EFL education.

A third article in dialogue also originates from Taiwanese scholars. Shu Ching Yang, Paichi Pat Shein and Wen-Chuan Lin. By chance their study resonates with the theme of this issue because of the way they highlight the role the analysis of metaphor can play in probing the identity constructs of teachers. In their study, they employed metaphorical analysis to investigate how pre-service teachers view English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses at the beginning of their teacher education programmes. They found that the teachers' metaphorical conceptualisations tended to be student-centred, reflecting beliefs about teaching practice and generally stemming

from personal and school experiences. Overall, the written metaphors were found to provide access to pre-service teachers' preconceived notions of teaching prior to entering the classroom.

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