

Editorial: Research methodologies as framing the study of English/literacy teaching and learning (Part 2)

CAROL FULLER

Institute of Education, University of Reading

ANDREW GOODWYN

Institute of Education, University of Reading

This issue follows on from the Volume 11, Number 1 (May, 2012), with a further exploration of what we mean by research in the field of English and Literacy Education and how we explain and justify its many methodologies. It has a particular focus on the nature of becoming a researcher as well as the relationship of teachers of the “subject” to both the research literature and becoming an active researcher. The first half of this issue looks at the methodological issues experienced by practitioners engaged in research and explores some of the strengths and tensions in this process.

Blakemore’s paper reflects on the dilemmas and problems faced by inexperienced researchers working within the field of education and also highlights the possible benefits and difficulties encountered when applying the findings of small-scale studies to the teaching of English. The paper reemphasises the validity of action-research projects and suggests the importance of maintaining a tradition of teacher-researchers in the secondary English classroom.

Tour also considers the ways that, as an emergent researcher, whose understanding of language education was mostly informed by individualistic psychology and linguistics, significant challenges were encountered in designing a project examining international students’ technology use in English as a second language (ESL). Informed by autoethnography, the paper is written in the form of a narrative in which the authors draws on her educational and teaching experiences in the USSR and, after its collapse, in the newly independent country Belarus, to explore the origins of her early positivist views on language teaching and technology use. The paper discusses how these understandings have been challenged and changed through a major epistemological shift during the research process and how this shift has influenced the research methodology of her current doctoral study. Some reflections about the value of autoethnography to explore research experiences are also discussed.

Johnson chronicles her journey as a doctoral student in English Education as she navigated the decision of research methodologies, a decision she discusses as reflecting not only the kind of work one will engage in, but also ways of doing, being, valuing and believing (Gee, 2012). The paper explores how participating in a research apprenticeship during her first year helped to mediate the tensions between these competing discourses. She discusses how during the research apprenticeship, she investigated her own learning of the research process and how engaging in a kind of autoethnographic study (Ellis, 2004) helped to bridge the seemingly insurmountable divide between quantitative and qualitative research. The paper concludes by suggesting that viewing research methods as discourses and encouraging doctoral students to participate in research apprenticeships early on while also investigating their own learning processes may help them adapt more easily to the kinds of dispositions and ways of thinking valued in scholarly research. Becoming fluent in

multiple discourses might also enable doctoral students to become “border-crossers” (Ball & Lampert, 1999) who translate and make connections between the different realms of quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Hulburt and Knotts explore how an examination of teacher candidate inquiry projects led to an examination of their own experiences as teacher education practitioner-researchers and competing narratives about education research. They describe how in the process of doing research, they came to recognise how their experiences and methodological decisions impacted the process of their inquiry and the implications they could claim. Through a review of abstracts for inquiry projects created over the past ten years by interns in a professional development school English education program, they explore how the grand narrative of educational research may affect the meaning of inquiry and how this may have implications for teacher education. They argue for pragmatic approaches that foster an inquiry stance in teacher candidates as a way to position future educators as autonomous knowledge-makers who have a prominent role in education research.

In her article, Looker integrates a theoretical discussion of methodology with reflection on her recently completed dissertation research, a longitudinal study of undergraduate student writers’ encounters with representations of academic literacy and standard language. The paper focuses on her efforts to research with, not on, the six undergraduates who participated in the study, involving these students as active co-analysts with much to contribute to shaping the story their qualitative data told. She considers the ways she found herself complicating, not only the role of students as research participants, but also her own role as researcher – a role that became increasingly hard to extricate from those of teacher, colleague, advocate and friend. She argues that these complications should be read not as obstacles to objectivity, but rather as strengths and sources of especially rich data. Ultimately, she contends that blurring the roles of researcher and participant is a necessary step in transforming qualitative research about student writers, in order to allow students greater agency in telling the stories of their literate lives.

Hyder’s paper presents a reflective narrative of the process of designing a PhD project. Using the analogy of the play *One Man, Two Guvnors*, this paper discusses the tensions a beginning researcher faces in reconciling her own vision for a project with the academic demands of doctoral-level study. Focusing on an ethnographic study of a reading group for visually impaired people, the paper explores how the researcher’s developing understanding of the considerations necessary when working with disabled people impacted on the research design. In particular, it focuses on the conflict faced by doctoral students when working in a paradigm that requires actively involving research participants, thereby relinquishing some control over the project. The aim of the paper is to provide an honest narrative that will resonate with other beginning researchers.

In the second half, the value and limitations of various research approaches to the field of English more broadly are explored. Papers raise questions on the nature and practice of the research process as well as pose some key questions for consideration. Hickey’s paper asks: What is the journey of acquiring language? What is the journey of sharing it? These questions compelled the hermeneutic phenomenological investigation (Gadamer, 1960/2004; van Manen, 1997) that led to the paper presented

here. Guided by the voice of Heidegger (1954/2008), the author discovered the necessity of “un-learning to learn” in order to hear the voices of the elementary English learners who were at the heart of her study. Phenomenology, with its emphasis on lived experience, led to a re-examination of the researcher’s own language learning experiences as a point of connection to the participants. Through conversations and visits with elementary English learners, the papers discusses how the author sought to discover the experiences of learning English in a United States public school and to uncover insights with pedagogical and methodological implications and how this led to a questioning of previously held conceptions of English learning and teaching.

The paper from Simon, Campano, Broderick and Pantoja examines the potential of practitioner research to deepen and concretise our understandings of critical and transformative literacy theories. These contributions are often generated from what they have described as counter-practices: resistant pedagogies that are grounded in consequential connections with students, communities, and larger social movements (Campano & Simon, 2010). Drawing on collaborative practitioner research conducted in a graduate literacy classroom, they explore a number of questions. In the spirit of the dialogic methodology they advocate, this is a multi-voiced paper and suggest several interconnected ways that practitioner research methodologies can contribute to a more dialectical vision of literacy practice and theory.

Lee’s paper discusses the ways that experimental methods have played a significant role in the growth of English teaching and learning studies. The paper presented here outlines basic features of experimental design, including the manipulation of independent variables, the role and practicality of randomised controlled trials (RCTs) in educational research, and alternative methods and techniques available in the absence of RCTs. It further reviews validity issues inherent in conducting experimental research, in particular sources of internal and external invalidity, and how to remedy them. Along the way, the author suggests that researchers remain mindful of these threats, and calls for the replication of studies across different research contexts with the purposes of the cross-validation and generalisation of findings. The remainder of the paper concludes with suggestions on how to develop a more embedded and sophisticated experimental design in light of the current literature of mixed methodology (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), in order to have more explanatory power and compensate for the weaknesses associated with the experimental method. Throughout the paper, the author illustrates the points with examples relevant to English teaching and learning research.

Finally, Lammers, Curwood and Magnifico consider the ways that researchers seek to make sense of young people’s online literacy practices and how participation, questions of methodology are important to consider. In their paper they seek to understand the culture of physical, virtual and blended spheres that adolescents inhabit and the necessity of expanding Gee’s (2004) notion of affinity spaces. They draw on research examining adolescent literacies related to *The Sims* video games, *The Hunger Games* novels, and the *Neopets* online game to explicate nine features of affinity space research that reflect participation in, and research about, online environments. They argue that studying adolescent literacies in affinity spaces affords access to participants outside a geographic proximity, a readily available web-based historical record of the affinity spaces’ practices, and a way to trace literacy practices

across portals, modes and texts. However, affinity space research poses challenges, including issues of recruiting and maintaining relationships with participants, the instability and impermanence of online environments and artefacts, and the porous boundaries of field sites. The paper concludes with recommendations for future literacy research conducted in online spaces and implications for literacy teaching and learning, aiming to begin articulating a new methodological framework for studying affinity spaces: affinity space ethnography.

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