

SUPPORTING THE (LANGUAGE) TEACHING-RESEARCH NEXUS

FROM PRACTICE TO RESEARCH (AND BACK)

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (LEARNING FROM STUDENTS)

- 1997-2000: English conversation in Yamaguchi-ken – lots of questions, few answers!
- 2000-2005: EAP teacher / MEd lecturer at the University of Sydney – applied master's insights and formed PhD study
- 2005-2008: Sophia University's Department of English – readjustment!
- 2008-2016: Sophia University's Faculty of Liberal Arts – is this language teaching?
- *2016-present: UK*



TESOL TEACHING-RESEARCH NEXUS

There is a growing popular discourse that the **intellectualization** of the field of language teaching has resulted in a growing **divide** between language teaching researchers and professionals (McKinley, 2019), as well as SLA and language teaching (Gass et al. 2021)

A result of this divide may be that many teachers no longer engage with (Marsden & Kasproicz, 2017; Davari Torshizi, 2018; Sato & Loewen, 2019) or find relevance in (Paran, 2017) journals that were once earmarked as vehicles of 'language teaching research'.*



A BIFURCATION OF TEACHING AND RESEARCH

- A divide may be the result of “a strengthening of the so-called ‘ivory tower’ within academia, where many [language education] researchers mingle in an isolated academic community ‘above’ while the majority of teachers ‘below’ are distanced from research and disempowered” (Rose, 2019, p. 896).
- Language teaching research is ‘overrated’ and ‘misapplied’ concerning pedagogical implications (Al-Hoorie, Hiver, Kim and De Costa, 2021, p. 138).



GRASSROOTS TEACHING- INFORMED RESEARCH

Disrupts unidirectional flows of knowledge

Real-world language teaching generates
important questions

Teachers' trial and error

Experiential solutions

Problems are always in flux; the process is
open ended

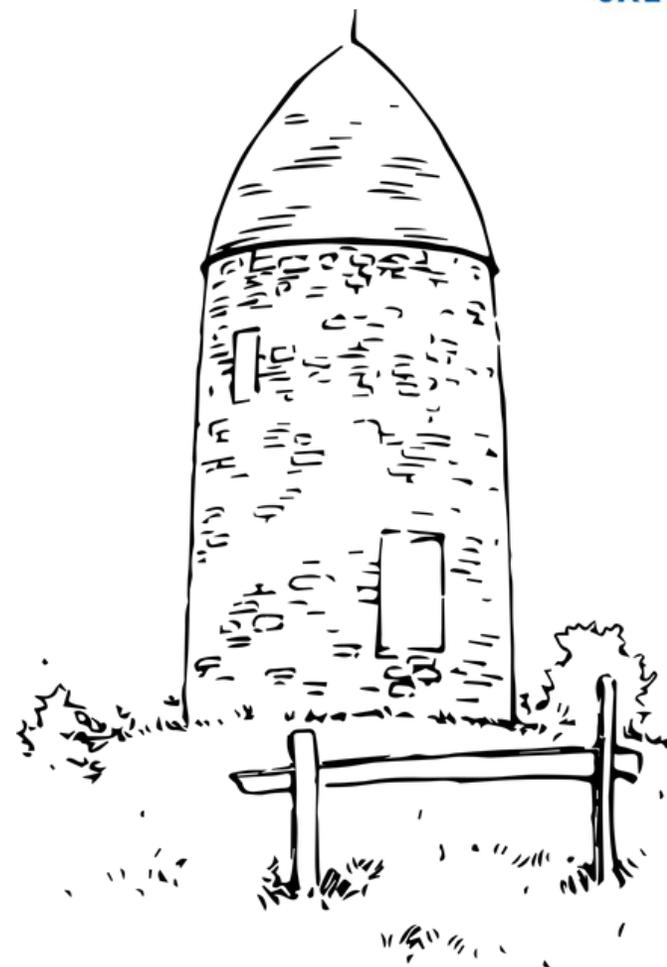


IVORY TOWER (BIFURCATION OF THE TEACHING-RESEARCH NEXUS)

The circular process of researcher-practitioners solving problems as they arise has been lost

Educational policy: language teaching researchers have left the classroom

Language teachers 'rely on'* research outside the classroom



DEVELOPMENTS IN JAPAN

Internationalization agenda

- Focus on students and the development of competitive graduates (Aizawa & McKinley, 2020; Rose & McKinley, 2018)
- Support for students with increased resources for English language educators and advisors
- Support for content instructors to deliver effective teaching in English (Bradford & Brown, 2018)
- Research highlighting the importance of learning from students to inform curriculum and policy formation for the purposes of better supporting students (e.g., Rose et al., 2020)

Academic contracts in Japan

- Contract precarity (Morley, Roberts, & Ota, 2021)
- Students first? (focus on teaching)
- Undervaluing of language teachers*
- Research expectations: grew with job competition
- Shift to research-active language teachers

TEACHING-RESEARCH NEXUS: EDUCATIONAL IDEOLOGIES

Ideology (Trowler & Wareham, 2007)	Relation to a nexus (McKinley et al., 2021, pp. 1027-1028)
Traditionalism	close connection between researcher and research students; nexus strongly supported at postgraduate level
Progressivism	connection enhanced when research activities encompass teaching; nexus enhanced when there is an overlap
Social reconstructionism	close connection centring on social justice agenda; nexus is strong
Enterprise	drift between teaching and research; transformation of the research-teaching nexus to the research-innovation nexus

TEACHING-RESEARCH NEXUS TENSIONS

An end to *holistic education*?

- Blackmore & Blackwell (2006, p. 375): “a holistic academic development approach would accept that the balance of activities may well change through an academic career, so that the proportions of research, teaching, knowledge transfer, management and so on might vary markedly. Yet all would be regarded as making a valuable contribution to the academic enterprise”
- Macfarlane (2010, p. 60): this “unbundling process” undermines “the holistic nature of professional identity with reward systems encouraging a strategic disengagement from broader elements of occupational responsibility in favour of specialisation”

The end of the nexus?

- the nexus no longer exists due to developments of research excellence frameworks, creating “an individualistic, competitive, disunited workplace” (McKenzie et al. 2018, p. 1)

Academic contracts (McIntosh, McKinley, & Mikolajweska, 2021)

- a nexus is valued at an individual level, but only realized at an institutional level

TEACHING-RESEARCH NEXUS: A UK PERSPECTIVE

- Evaluating teaching and research separately at a systemic level strains the relationship in the daily practices of the two activities, leading to individuals making compromises (McIntosh et al., 2022)
- Separated management roles with different heads of research to heads of teaching, as well as research-led or teaching-led promotion pathways (McKinley et al., 2021)

So, what about the '*holistic academic*'?

RECONCEPTUALIZING THE NEXUS (MCKINLEY ET AL., 2019)

- assumed bifurcation for several decades (see Neumann, 1992)
- leading up to challenges of the nexus as “a myth” (e.g., Elton, 2001)
- the need to go “beyond the nexus” by targeting individual experiences (e.g., Robertson, 2007)
- or by adding other elements to teaching and research (e.g., Jones, 2013)
- efforts to re-conceptualize the nexus (Trowler & Wareham, 2007) redefine it to “reaffirm the value of teaching” (Ryan, 2016) and operationalize it to recover “a practice of teaching-led research” (Charles, 2018)

TEACHING-LED TESOL RESEARCH (MCKINLEY, 2019)

- “TESOL research was traditionally led by researcher-practitioners, who acknowledged real-world English language teaching problems (in alignment with developments in establishing applied linguistics as a field of study) as the basis for research enquiries” (p. 875)
- “changes have contributed to a teaching and research bifurcation, where studies conducted by researchers who are removed from teaching tend to be more highly valued by the TESOL research community than many of the practical classroom-based, teaching-led work done by researcher-practitioners” (p. 875)

LANGUAGE TEACHER IDENTITIES

- The holistic academic is one who balances teaching and research and is held as an ideal of a personal nature, rather than an institutional one (Macfarlane, 2011)
- The ‘holistic TESOL professional’... (McKinley, 2019)

A nexus-based (holistic) TESOL agenda:

- *How* can we learn from our students?
- In what ways do students inform language teaching research?
- In what ways can students inform language teacher identities?

THE MODERN LANGUAGE JOURNAL SPECIAL ISSUE



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- Rose, H., & McKinley, J. (2022). May I see your credentials, please? Displays of pedagogical expertise by language teaching researchers. *The Modern Language Journal*, 106(3), 528-546.

May I See Your Warrant, Please?: Justifying Outcomes in Qualitative Research [Get access >](#)

JULIAN EDGE, KEITH RICHARDS

Applied Linguistics, Volume 19, Issue 3, September 1998, Pages 334–356,

- Nod to Edge and Richards' (1998) paper in *Applied Linguistics*, in which the authors write from their identities “as university teachers involved in, and committed to, pedagogically-motivated research in TESOL” (p. 334).
- The authors argue that (qualitative) research needs to be presented with a *warrant*, in which researchers establish a basis of legitimation and authentication of their research.
- Central to this warrant is the concept of *voice*, that is who is given the space to speak.

LISTENING TO THOSE IN THE CLASSROOM

Building on this notion, we interrogate *who is speaking* in language teaching research, arguing that researchers need to authenticate their own credentials as authors and researchers of language teaching.



RESEARCH DESIGN



Analysis of 400 author bios
in language teaching
research journals



Survey with these authors
to probe their
researcher/teacher identities

BIO ANALYSIS: MENTIONS OF RESEARCH AND TEACHING

	Research mentioned		Teaching mentioned	
	n	percentage	n	percentage
Yes	381	95.25%	123	30.75%
No	19	4.75%	265	66.25%
Unclear	0	0%	12	3%
Total	400	100%	400	100%

“Her research interests are in linguistic ethnography” (TQ).

“... is an active practitioner and teacher-researcher working predominately in East and Southeast Asia for the past ten years. He has taught at all levels, beginning with young learners before shifting his focus to the upper secondary and tertiary levels” (LT).

SURVEY: BELIEFS ABOUT A TEACHING-RESEARCH NEXUS

	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Language teaching research is written for a researcher community	196	5	1	6	4.69	1.086
Language teaching research addresses issues of importance to language teachers	196	5	1	6	4.42	.944
There is a gap between research published in journals and issues of importance to the teaching profession	196	4	2	6	4.39	1.106
There is a gap between issues that teachers and researchers are interested in	196	4	2	6	4.31	.986
Language teaching research is written for a language teacher community	196	5	1	6	3.57	1.077
Teachers tend to refer to language teaching research	196	5	1	6	2.86	1.072

OPINIONS

- If one attempts to target both audiences in every paper, “We risk watering down theory and complicating practice... ..not all papers can serve both researchers and teachers”.
- “When writing for different journals I write with a different audience in mind, e.g., *Modern Language Journal* - researcher audience, *ELTJ* - teacher audience”.
- “Sorry to be blunt, but if research were to completely disappear, teaching practice will not be affected”.
- “Teachers are usually told what to do by authors who have not been in the classroom for years”.
- “There is a need for journals and articles that bridge the gap between researchers and teachers. Some journals used to do this... ..but they have largely given up this role.”

DISCUSSION

- A majority of author bios may be contributing to the idea that ‘researcher’ and ‘teacher’ are distinct identities (Maley, 2016; Medgyes, 2017).
- In order for language teaching research to bridge the rhetorical divide between researchers and teachers, authors (and the language teaching journals they publish in) must make concerted efforts to foreground their own professional credentials that legitimize their authority to write about language teaching.
- We urge language teaching researchers to carefully consider how they construct their identities for a broad readership to reveal the complexly qualified professional who is often hidden behind a seemingly impenetrable author profile.

TESOL TEACHER-RESEARCHERS IN JAPAN (MCKINLEY, 2019)

- “In TESOL, while it is sufficiently common to find an academic who did at one time teach English, it is less common to find them still teaching English unless they are in contexts where English language teaching is part of their academic role. In these contexts, where academics are required to teach English language, for example **Japan**, the weight of the teaching on their schedules usually leads to less opportunity to devote time to research. Indeed, in these contexts, institutions likely have less expectation of research output, recognising the obligations of teaching as substantial and in many cases the main contribution to the institution. These academics are in **better positions to identify as TESOL researcher-practitioners (or holistic TESOL professionals)**, but it is not always up to them how they choose to balance teaching and research.” (pp. 879-880)

LOOKING BACK, WHAT WOULD I DO DIFFERENTLY?

- Japan: Researchers are teaching English – in an ideal position, actually in language classrooms teaching language – there’s no gap; it’s part of their identity, everyday practice
- Those in Japan could easily identify as holistic language teaching professionals, rather than detached researchers who aren’t in language classrooms...
- But are they taking the opportunities? Taking advantage of their unique positions?

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