

# Linking teaching with research

10 July 2007

University of Southampton, Avenue Campus

## Abstracts

### Session 1

---

#### The use of research to improve teaching and learning in the foreign language classroom

Nuria López and Noelia Alcarazo

University of Leicester

Teachers of foreign languages in UK higher education institutions are mainly defined by our teaching practice, which together with preparation and marking occupies most of our working hours, leaving us with little time to pursue research interests.

However, whenever we try to improve our teaching practice, and consequently to enhance our students' performance, we find that research is the means by which we can achieve that, and at the same time, we discover that the research we are interested in can only be done by making use of our experiences in the classroom. In this presentation, we will explain how we have benefited from this close relationship between teaching and research and taking our teaching and research as an example, we will focus on the following aspects:

- how research topics are identified from first-hand experience in the classroom
- how teaching practice is used to conduct research
- how research is used to enhance language teaching and learning

By showing the enriching impact of our research on our teaching practice, the learning process and performance of our students, we hope to encourage other foreign language teachers to use their experience in the classroom to embark on research that will be useful to all of us. Furthermore, in the light of the lack of support and interest that pedagogic research receives in many language departments, we hope to demonstrate the importance of this type of research to improving the quality of teaching and learning.

#### Action research for curriculum developments in languages: identifying troublesome grammar knowledge

Marina Orsini-Jones, Coventry University

This paper will report on the results of an action-research project carried out at Coventry University between 2003-2006 that resulted in student-feedback-centred changes to the syllabus of the module Academic and Professional Skills for Language Learning in general and to the design of an assessed task 'the grammar project' for that module in particular. The syllabus of the above-mentioned module is revised regularly according to a cycle of action research: a phase of 'reconnaissance' (or identification of a problematic issue or issues) normally precedes the start of the cycle, followed by planning, implementation/action(s), observation, reflection and re-planning, that is:

- A problematic issue is identified;

- change is planned collaboratively (staff and students) to address the issue;
- the change process is implemented - 'acted out';
- all agents involved in the change process reflect upon its outcomes, both while it is happening and at the end of the first phase of implementation;
- actions are taken to re-plan the changes and the second phase of the action-research cycle starts.

The paper will illustrate how the outcomes of the research cycle impacted on the design of the syllabus on a yearly basis for the duration of the project.

### **Piloting a framework for learner strategy training to support independent learning**

María Blanco-Hermida  
University of Westminster

This presentation recounts the piloting of a framework for learner strategy training in four groups of Institution-Wide-Language Spanish beginners' courses.

It describes the rationale and steps of a research informed framework that was used (a) to raise awareness of learner strategies which can be used in/outside the class to learn vocabulary and grammar, and to develop the four language skills (b) to promote a strategic approach to independent learning (c) to increase students' motivation and self-efficacy.

The strategy training was explicit and delivered in seven short sessions during the Spanish lessons. Lecturer's reflections on the training were recorded in a journal after each session and feedback from the students was obtained through semi-structured questionnaires at the end of the first and second semesters. An example of a strategy training session and a summary of the feedback from the students will be discussed during this presentation.

## **Session 2**

---

### **Teaching and researching L2 writing: Exploring academic identities as teachers and researchers in a Spanish university setting**

Rosa M. Manchón, Liz Murphy and Julio Roca de Larios  
Universidad de Murcia

In this presentation we will share a programme of research on the acquisition of academic literacy by a group of Spanish university EFL students as part of their degree in English Studies. Our aim will be twofold. First, we will explain the research project as part of a culture of practice (Spanish university system) in which doing and publishing high quality research is mandatory for both institutional and individual research assessment exercises. With this we will contribute to the conference's aim of presenting the experience of other countries. Second, we will describe the planning and implementation of our research in order to analyse two issues - the rationale behind the methodological and ethical decisions taken in order to keep separate the roles of researchers and teacher on one hand. On the other hand we will reflect on the research from an outsider's perspective (that of researcher) and from an insider's perspective (that of the teacher-researcher) in order to ascertain what we have learned about both (i) investigating writing as a socially-situated phenomenon; and (ii) the conditions afforded by the learning/teaching context

investigated, and how these insights can help us in our own future pedagogical decision making.

### The role of professional doctorates in the development of academic roles and identities

Catherine Watts and Angela Pickering  
University of Brighton

Each presenter was awarded a professional doctorate (EdD) by King's College, University of London in 2002. This was a "journey of learning" in itself, with various opportunities for continuing professional development arising along the way. Each presenter now teaches on the Doctorate in Education at the University of Brighton where they work. Their current lectures are informed by their own individual EdD journeys and their experiences of combining doctoral study with normal lecturing duties during the four years leading to the successful completion of their doctorates. This presentation explores the ways in which the experience of being both teacher and learner has informed our understandings of the complex relationships between teaching, learning and research, whilst reflecting on our current academic identities as university teachers and researchers. On the basis of this, we raise issues for discussion and consideration.

## Session 3

---

### Learning from teaching or how classroom teaching can benefit our research Hanna Thompson, SOAS

The question of how our research influences our teaching is frequently asked and those of us who are involved in both teaching and research will probably all be able to provide examples of how new research findings make their way into our teaching.

But what do we take from our class-room experiences into our research? In this paper I would like to think about the influence classroom teaching has on our research questions, the way it can change our research direction and open our eyes to new research methods.

I will illustrate these points with examples from my own work in the field of Bengali grammatical structures and show how the need for clear and simple explanations in the classroom has transformed my approach to the research I do.

### The presence of language research in undergraduate education

Matilde Sainz, Pili Sagasta and Julia Barnes  
Mondragon Unibertsitatea

Communities such as the Basque Country, with two official languages plus a third language in education, require professionals able to deal with a wide range of areas related to language, such as in education (multilingual education, integrated language curriculum, teaching of foreign and second languages etc.), and in the community. Such people require multidisciplinary undergraduate training in areas such as language learning, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and so on.

These future language professionals will need to view language as a dynamic entity, ever in a process of change, and their training should also involve designing projects, and then learning how to implement them and how to continually improve upon them, which is where the role of research comes into play. We see such improvements as

the outcome of reflection and the role of research, be it action research, or another type, as crucial to this process.

In 1999 the University of Mondragon created an undergraduate degree programme designed to meet these requirements for language specialists. Active research plays a key role in the curriculum of the programme and is pivotal to the teaching of methodological aspects in various disciplines, to the understanding the value of research and to the end-of-degree project.

“Why can’t you understand that we don’t understand what you are talking about?”

Jelena Timotijevic, University of Brighton

After weekly lectures with a group of second year linguistics students I leave feeling fulfillment, enjoyment and satisfaction – my immediate thoughts are: “I had a great time in that class, really enjoyed it”, until two weeks ago when my world was shattered and I couldn’t see the point of being a teacher any longer. Following a great deal of struggle in class on the issues of ‘monosemy’ and ‘polysemy’ and their relationship to ‘modal’ meanings, and ‘what on earth is “core semantic meaning”, and what is “modal logic” all about; the students asked me, despairing: “Why can’t you understand that we don’t understand what you are talking about?” “And what is the point of this module in any case?”

This paper will explore questions that have arisen from the teaching experience of the above group of second year linguistics students studying a module ‘Linguistics and Grammar: concepts and analyses’:

- Who benefits in class from exploring the research in my discipline; and who has most fun?
- Is the student experience ‘narrowed down’ as a result of research-focused modules? How does this impact on shaping their degrees?
- If I am the researcher, should I be teaching? Or, should experiences similar to the one above, be put down to the growing skepticism to learning of successive generations of students?