

## More than a rite of passage? Debating the relevance of research with student teachers

Student teachers in ELT (English Language Teaching) Master's programmes often have to carry out research projects as part of their degree. This has to be seen in the context of an understanding of research as a vehicle for professional development (Burns, 2009) and a view of teachers as active participants in knowledge construction rather than passive recipients of knowledge (Kostoulas, 2018).

However, student teachers often struggle to balance their first research projects with their experiences in the classroom, especially if they already work part-time or even full-time in schools. They may feel that the final stages of their degree are dominated by the production of research at a time when they would prefer to focus on their teaching. In the worst case, this can lead to them perceiving the research they have to engage in as more of "a rite of passage than a real contribution to our understanding of how people learn languages" (Maley, 2016, "The difficulty", para. 5), which results in a belief that research has little to no relevance for their classroom practices.

In this talk, we will present a small-scale project we carried out together at a secondary school in a small town in Austria and share both our perspectives (one of us is a student teacher, the other a university instructor) on the process and the results. At the time of the project, the student teacher was in her first year of teaching and simultaneously completing an ELT Master's programme at university. In an attempt to apply ideas she encountered in her academic studies to her everyday work as a teacher, she decided to investigate her learner's reaction to Linguistic Landscape (LL) tasks which had been designed in one of the instructor's university courses. The LL tasks used in the project went through a process of feedback and revision by the student's peers in the ELT programme and her instructor at the university before they were trialed with the pupils in class. The pupils then submitted their work for analysis and recorded their reactions to the LL tasks in a questionnaire.

In our talk, we will take the student teacher perspective as our starting point and explore ways of setting up student research projects that generate results which are perceived as meaningful and applicable to practice by the student-researchers. We will discuss how projects such as ours can be characterized (classroom research, action research, exploratory practice, etc.; Freeman, 2018) and how they can contribute to teacher professional learning by including all three domains identified by Koffeman and Snoek (2019) as relevant for teacher learning: personal practice, social and theoretical. Finally, we will discuss how schools and universities need to cooperate to promote the professional learning of teachers in Master's programmes and beyond and what policies are needed to incentivise this kind of cooperation.

Burns, A. (2009). Action research in second language teacher education. In A. Burns and J.C. Richards (Eds.), *The Cambridge guide to second language teacher education* (pp. 289-297). CUP.

Freeman, D. (2018). Research as meaning-making: four approaches to teachers studying their own classrooms. In D. Xerri & C. Pioquinto (Eds.), *Becoming research literate: supporting teacher research in English language teaching* (pp. 24-29). English Teachers Association Switzerland.

Kostoulas, A. (2018). Developing teacher research competence: Simpler than you think, more necessary than you realise. In D. Xerri & C. Pioquinto (Eds.), *Becoming research literate: supporting teacher research in English language teaching* (pp. 13-18). English Teachers Association Switzerland.

Koffeman, A., & Snoek, M. (2019). Identifying context factors as a source for teacher professional learning. *Professional development in education*, 45(3), 456-471.

Maley, A. (2016). 'More Research is Needed' – A Mantra Too Far? *Humanising Language Teaching*, 18(3).  
<http://old.hlomag.co.uk/jun16/mart.htm>

## TEPE abstract

Theme 1: value of research in teacher education – the role of teachers and teacher educators as researchers

Theme 2: value of research on teacher education – innovative approaches in conducting teacher education research at pre-service and in-service levels

Theme 4: teacher education research and practice: designing research and curricula that are meaningful for the practice

Global English as a steppingstone for pre-/in-service teacher professionalization: developing effective Linguistic Landscape tasks

Applicable research for pre-service teachers: developing effective Linguistic Landscape tasks

Bridging the gap: pre-service teachers as Global English researchers

Global English: teacher professionalization through developing effective Linguistic Landscape tasks

- Argument 1: we tried to conduct meaningful research by finding a way to actually produce practical output through task design (pre-/in-service teachers designing Linguistic Landscape tasks for students in school)
  - o Awareness for English in the environment
  - o Direct feedback from teacher educators and students in school
- Argument 2: theory/research gap (Maley) is closed although not completely
- Argument 3: our project is an easy way to guide teachers towards their first research project (meaningful tasks, learning by doing/trying out in class [Maley], adapting if necessary)
- Argument 4: our research bridges the gap between researchers and teachers by helping them find a way to be both
- Argument 5: we will never actually solve the problem of seeming not “academic” enough
  - o Teacher-researcher is the same person + close to students (personal connections)
  - o It is influenced by experiencing the classroom and situation in school
  - o It will always be subjective to a certain degree

The LEAP Interface is committed to bridge/minimize the gap/differences between researchers and teachers by offering pre-service teacher the opportunity to conduct research with a meaningful and applicable outcome.