

Creation and Uptake of Language Classroom Research

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Abstract

The “First JACET Summer and English Education Joint Seminar” held at Kyoto in August 2018 had a classroom research theme framed by the following three questions: Why revisit classroom research now? Who are the practitioners? How might we approach classroom research now? This paper explores these three questions about language classroom research by raising some of the key issues in the English language teaching field about publication (engagement *in* research) related to practice and the uptake of ideas in published research (engagement *with* research). A primary focus of this paper is on the relevance to classroom practitioners of articles published in prestigious journals in the ELT field. The paper concludes with suggestions for closing the gap between what researchers write for consumption and what second/foreign language teachers want to consume in terms of research on teaching.

Keywords: classroom research, engagement in/with research, writing for publication, team learning

Researchers research and publish findings, teachers teach, and students study. This sums up the status quo view of the hierarchy in the English language teaching (ELT) field. However, there have been many voices over the past 40-plus years claiming that the status quo is dysfunctional and, as such, is holding the field back. Perhaps the force maintaining this alignment is distrust: “There is a great deal of distrust of theory among English language teachers. They tend to see it as remote from their actual experience, an attempt to mystify common-sense practices by unnecessary abstraction” (Widdowson, 2003, p. 1). It is certainly possible to dispute Widdowson’s claim as an overgeneralization given the heterogeneous makeup of the ELT field. However, it remains the case that theorists tend to overreach and produce overly-general theories that often leave the key element of implementation for others to figure out (see Clarke, 1994). This awkward situation was characterized in the 100th anniversary issue of the influential *Modern Language Journal* by editor Heidi Byrnes as the “often-times noxious research versus teaching dichotomy” (2016, p. 7).

If we accept this analysis of a gap between knowledge creation and uptake in the field, what kind of professional accounts are needed? I argue the patently obvious point that for uptake and implementation of research findings, teacher buy-in is crucial. Teacher buy-in of ideas requires that published research resonates as authentic to classroom practitioners. The question seems to be how to achieve that goal. Who is in the most advantageous position to write accounts of how theory gets implemented in practice?

In seeking answers to that question, this paper addresses the three questions that framed the “First JACET Summer and English Education Joint Seminar” held at Kyoto in August 2018: Why revisit classroom research now? Who are the practitioners? How might we approach classroom research now? In the remainder of this paper, I explore how stated objectives for addressing the theory/practice divide in ELT are actualized via the creation (research & publication) and consumption (uptake) of knowledge.

Why Revisit Classroom Research?

More than 35 years ago, Michael Long pointed out the significance of practitioners researching their own practice. Long observed that early classroom research studies revealed “what actually goes on in ESL classrooms, as opposed to what is believed to go on, and as distinct from what writers on TESL methods tell us ought to go on” (Long, 1984, p. 422). A decade later, Donald Freeman lamented: “For too long teaching has been treated as something which certain people do and others research. ... Thus, teachers are constantly having what they know defined for them by others” (1996, p. 106). Reflecting on her time hosting university researchers in her classroom for an extended period, Schecter (1997) explained that they never bothered to ask her what she thought nor did they return to explain their results. Unfortunately, this schism still exists (Sato & Loewen, 2019). The attitude conveyed by Freeman and Schecter reflects the common hierarchy of credibility in TESOL; Researchers research and publish, teachers teach and students study.

The theory/research-practice gap in applied linguistics has been a recurring theme in the literature for over 40 years. In 1985, Lightbown was not confident that SLA research could guide classroom teachers. Her confidence grew by the turn of the century, but she still felt the need to warn practitioners, as Hatch (1978) had earlier, to apply theories generated by SLA researchers with “caution” (Lightbown, 2000). This advice was later echoed by Ellis (2005, p. 210) who asserted that the SLA field’s potential advice to language teachers needed to be accepted as “tentative” and “provisional”.

It is no secret that publishers of learning materials, particularly student textbooks, are interested in the acquisition of new markets and profits rather than findings of classroom research. Journals in the field which publish research findings have obviously felt pressure to try to address the theory-practice issue since it surfaces so often. Editorial policies of the flagship research journals often require authors to connect their research findings to practice or vice versa (Chapelle, 2007). After all, the dissemination of research is what the academy, and the industry of academic publication, is all about, arguably. Researchers engaged in the field of second/foreign language education have long hoped for a reciprocal flow between the findings they produce and the actual work done in classrooms by practitioners.

Despite this wish, the realities of hiring, retention, and tenure within academia, together with the digital magnification of journal *impact factors*, serve to intensify the tradition of writing up research to meet the expectations of a limited audience of peer researchers (Montgomery & Smith, 2015). Simply put, the impact factor of a journal is calculated by the number of times articles published in the journal have been cited as calculated in key citation databases over a year (see Egbert, 2007). The journals with the highest impact factor ratings tend to be those in the top tier. To get published in these journals authors need to meet the expectations of

influential colleagues in the field. As a result, manuscripts often are seen by practitioners as “out of touch’ with the day-to-day realities of [teachers]” (Montgomery & Smith, 2015, p. 100). This gap in expectations is summarized well by Kiely (2014, p. 443) who echoes Widdowson: “If teachers feel researchers do not understand their task in classroom teaching, they are unlikely to be persuaded to innovate or experiment” based on published research findings.

Is it wise for classroom teachers to ignore manuscripts published in major journals? On the other hand, how prudent is it for writers of such manuscripts not to include realistic consideration for classroom implementation of their recommendations? Journals in the field that are highly valued by university-based researchers are where theory is published. These respected journals set the agenda for the field. They tell us what we should be talking about, thinking about, and researching. The journals also codify the discourse conventions within which ideas need to be framed if they are to be heard. What’s more, they tell prospective writers which language has the highest currency for their career prospects. Worldwide today, academic writers are “less likely to publish in their own languages and to find their English language publications cited more often” (Hyland, 2010, p. 58).

Of course, theories are value-laden. With regard to the major journals, what gets published reflects the values of the journal reviewers and editorial board members. These positions are nearly exclusively held by university-based researchers who often do not teach undergraduate students. The bubble at the top of the educational hierarchy has a unique ecology. At these elevated heights, ideas emerge, people are moved to adopt them, and powerful ideologies are disseminated. Scanning the research landscape, an engaged ELT classroom practitioner might wonder which ideas to follow.

Models and Memes

The current trend in the second language teaching profession is for “evidence-based” or “research-informed” teaching. By using words like “research” and “evidence” these concepts take on an air of objective neutrality, however, practitioners should be wary. As an example, there is convincing evidence to show that management systems introduced in higher education since 1960 often fail because they lack clear definitions and, therefore, are applied inconsistently (see Birnbaum, 2001 for a thorough analysis). By framing these management innovations as scientific and rigorous, a myth of precision and efficiency is created by the true believers. This myth is then reinforced by memes – ideas capable of self-propagation through repetition – that are spread by word-of-mouth (or via social media) throughout an institution. As Birnbaum explains, memes allow *ideas to adopt people* because they are easy to remember and sound reasonable, so they roll off the tongue and are difficult to counter. Who among us would stand up against these memes that have circulated in higher education: relevance, accountability, quality, efficiency, best practice, reinvention, and win-win? Since almost everyone wants to be seen to be in favor of these things, they gain footholds in institutions that struggle to implement these nebulous concepts.

The efficiency and accountability memes form a more-or-less natural bond with computers and digital solutions such as the current trend in the use of algorithms for teacher evaluation. One now used in the United States is Value Added Modeling (VAM). As the name tells us, this model will obviously “add value” to schools as it holds teachers accountable for “good teaching”.

Who is against adding value to schools? The problem, according to mathematician Kathy O’Neil (2016), is that the math behind the model is not understandable. The source code is a guarded top secret that cannot be scrutinized by outsiders. A think-tank in Madison Wisconsin is in charge of the model. It has a licensing contract stating that nobody can see the source code; including U.S. Department of Education officials, members of school boards, teachers, teacher unions, parents and students. No teacher understands what their score means, which makes it impossible for teachers to improve (O’Neil, 2016). In short, accountability for teachers is deemed to be important, while there is zero accountability for the evaluation model used to judge teachers.

Models are embedded opinions with their own biases. The problem with VAM, of course, is lack of feedback which is crucial to revise the algorithm because: “Without feedback a statistical engine can continue spinning out faulty and damaging analysis while never learning from its mistakes” (O’Neil, 2016, p. 14). When the algorithm used in Washington, D.C. in 2010-2011 identified 206 educators as “bad teachers,” how did it verify this and learn if it was in fact correct? Regrettably, this was not a valid question because the validity of the model, and its superiority over previous methods, was presumed from the start by the creators. Since the model cannot be questioned and openly assessed, the value generated by the system becomes truth. But who creates truth in these models?

A model’s blind spots reflect the judgments and priorities of its creators. ... The value-added model in Washington, D.C., schools [...] evaluates teachers largely on the basis of students’ test scores, while ignoring how much the teachers engage the students, work on specific skills, deal with classroom management, or help students with personal and family problems. It’s overly simple, sacrificing accuracy and insight for efficiency. Yet from the administrators’ perspective it provides an effective tool to ferret out hundreds of apparently underperforming teachers, even at the risk of misreading some of them. Here we see that models, despite their reputation for impartiality, reflect goals and ideology. (O’Neil, 2016, p. 25)

Turning back to the question of why revisit classroom research at this time, one primary reason would be that a lot of the research is being done *on* teachers and students rather than *with* teachers and students (Stewart, 2006). Funding feeds this trend. There is serious money behind some of the recent research projects on schools in the United States. An instructive case in point is research by the Gates Foundation. Like most Silicon Valley billionaires, Gates believes the self-promoting meme that plutocrats possess special knowledge and can change the world (Giridharadas, 2018). In this case, the goal was to improve outcomes in America’s schools. Evaluation of the seven-year (US\$1 billion) study was done by the nonprofit RAND. The RAND evaluators concluded that there was no significant correlation between teacher effectiveness, class size and student achievement-graduation rates (Berke, 2018). The focus of the research was on reshaping incentives for teachers and teacher evaluation. The conclusion was that focusing on teacher effectiveness alone is not enough to improve student outcomes. Teaching is not simply ‘providing content,’ it’s a relationship. Determining the influence of affective factors on teaching-learning statistically is simply not possible.

There is nothing new about outside researchers telling classroom practitioners how they should teach. This is a recurring situation that gains momentum periodically under a new

banner or meme. As a technocrat with an obvious self-interest, Gates believes 'big data' is a holy grail that will solve human dilemmas and help create more efficient organizations. The initiative described above is clearly evidence-based. While evidence is certainly necessary for making decisions, the question is what kind of evidence is valued, how it gets collected and analyzed, who makes that decision, and *how* reports are composed? A real concern amongst educators is that the evidence-based education movement hailed by technocrats is becoming a new dominant meme that limits possibilities for classroom research by assuming the end of debate on:

[T]he purpose of research, the questions that should be asked, the relationship between the researcher and the “objects” of research, the methods employed, standards for reporting research results, and relationships between research and practice. ... There is no question that the current regime of scientifically based research and evidence-based education positions practitioners as the recipients of other people’s knowledge. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, pp. 10–11)

Rather than shutting students and teachers out of the research process, it seems to be time once again to advocate for teachers to have a stronger voice in education policies and practices. In its most recent research agenda, the TESOL International Association acknowledges the need for “increased emphasis on the agency of teachers as advocates for change inside and outside of their classrooms” (TESOL, 2014, p. 2).

Who Are The Practitioners?

The focus of this article is second language classroom research. It is generally agreed that “research” needs to involve collecting, analyzing and interpreting data related to some focus (i.e., research question or hypothesis) and should be made public either through oral presentation or as a manuscript. Given this process, the vast majority of journal articles published in the ELT field are authored by university educators. Studies of academic writing have concluded that, unfortunately, university-based researchers often write in a style that is inaccessible to classroom teachers (e.g., Marsden & Kaspruwicz, 2017).

Confusion over the definitions of specialized terminology adds to the obscure nature of some academic prose. Richards, Ross, and Seedhouse point out: “One problem in research into language learning is that there is a proliferation of terminology, and terms are often associated with particular approaches or methodologies. Hence, the same phenomenon may have a different name when examined using a different methodology” (2012, p. 49).

Consider the following terms for instance: reflective practice, reflective teaching, teacher research, practitioner research, practitioner inquiry, exploratory practice, and action research. From this list, it is possible to select practitioner research as a good choice for an ‘umbrella term’. In her definition of educational practitioner research, Anne Burns (2016) identified significant overlap with other defined areas of research such as ethnography and case study. In addition to this, she emphasized the eclectic nature of data collection, as well as the variable formats and styles of reporting used which are “in flux” and “inevitably determined by the target audience” (Burns 2016, p. 57). That target audience often is the select group of peers based at universities that one must impress for professional survival.

In a recent paper, I attempted to situate some of the terms listed within the larger context of

practitioner research through a systemic analysis (Stewart, 2019). Rather than reproduce that work, in this section I will briefly define a couple of the key terms.

Teacher Research

Pioneers in education such as Stenhouse (1975), through his concept of ‘the teacher as researcher,’ paved the way for the contemporary rationale for viewing the classroom as a research site and teachers as research practitioners (e.g., Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). In the TESOL field, the work of Allwright and Bailey (1991) was influential for teachers interested in researching practice. The underlying rationale for teacher research is that by exploring the activity in their own classrooms, teachers better understand their own practice. In this way, teacher research is often linked to professional development.

The defining feature of teacher research is the researcher. The agent who conducts the research is the classroom teacher. This dominant variable is constant and is independent of research location and research methods. Definitions of teacher research commonly describe self-initiated “inquiry conducted by teachers in their own professional contexts” systematically (Borg, 2013, p. 8).

Language Classroom Research

The term classroom research is often a cover term for “a whole range of research studies on classroom language learning and teaching” (Allwright & Bailey, 1991, p. 2). My discussion above of related terms indicates that there is an accompanying range of synonyms used to describe such research.

Leo van Lier (1988) defined a language classroom as, “the gathering, for a given period of time, of two or more persons (one of whom generally assumes the role of instructor) for the purposes of language learning” (p. 47). Today, gathering together for the purposes of teaching and learning no longer indicates a physical space, given virtual and hybrid learning. Language classroom researchers are now able to “go beyond the four walls of the traditional classroom to conduct research” (Nunan & Bailey, 2009, p. 21).

Classroom-based research is also referred to as classroom-centered research. According to Allwright (1983), classroom-centered research “simply tries to investigate what happens inside the classroom when learners and teachers come together” (p. 191). Allwright explained further that the main concern of classroom-centered/classroom-based research is the process and sequence of lessons, interaction between participants, and activity related to teaching and learning. Classroom research can be conducted by insiders or outsiders and as a result is related closely to the broad category practitioner research, where practitioners are defined as people who engage in research practices (see Stewart, 2019).

Table 1 describes activity related to four key terms visible from *etic* or *emic* perspectives. The obvious point about Table 1 is that teacher research does not exist from the *etic* perspective. When teacher educators examine their own practice, for example, they adopt the *emic* perspective. Another interesting point is that classroom research can include either the outsider or the insider view, or both if organized as collaborative research or in professional learning communities. This means that a continuum of research perspectives exists in language classroom research.

The place of action research in TESOL classroom research is important as is evident in Table 1. Action research is a procedure, or method, for conducting classroom research. Not all classroom research follows the procedures that define action research so they are not the same thing. However, action research is always a form of teacher research, and classroom research, when conducted by teachers in their professional contexts.

Table 1
Terminology for Types of Research in Second Language Classrooms

ETIC		EMIC
<i>Who?</i> Outside researchers <i>What?</i> Things outsiders see <i>How?</i> e.g., observation, recording	Practitioner Research	<i>Who?</i> Classroom teachers (students, administrators, etc.) <i>What?</i> Things insiders know <i>How?</i> e.g., self-evaluation, reflective teaching, teacher research, classroom research
<i>Who?</i> Outside researchers <i>What?</i> Things outsiders see <i>How?</i> e.g., stimulated recall	Reflective Practice	<i>Who?</i> Classroom teachers (students, administrators, etc.) <i>What?</i> Things insiders know <i>How?</i> e.g., journals, lesson reports, action research
<i>Who?</i> Outside researchers; teachers in collaboration <i>What?</i> Things outsiders see; combined with insider knowledge <i>How?</i> e.g., case-study research, survey research, ethnography, narrative, interviews, discourse analysis	Classroom Research	<i>Who?</i> Classroom teachers, researchers in collaboration (students, administrators, etc.) <i>What?</i> Things insiders know; combined with researchers' knowledge <i>How?</i> e.g., action research, think-aloud protocols, survey research, interviews, discourse analysis, exploratory practice
	Teacher Research	<i>Who?</i> Classroom teachers (students, administrators, etc.) <i>What?</i> Things insiders know <i>How?</i> e.g., action research, autoethnography, narrative, survey research, exploratory practice

A Question of Values

Ellis (2012, p. 26) contends that “the value of practitioner research lies more in the process of conducting it than in the product of the research.” This point partially explains confusion over terminology because the objectives of ‘research’ in language classrooms, as conducted by researchers from the outside and teachers on the inside, are usually different. When different outcomes are valued by different types of research practitioners, understandings about what constitutes research can easily become clouded. If questions about values related to classroom research differ between the various research agents, then research methods and use of related terminology are likely to be affected.

Researchers from the outside will often have purposes such as evaluating teachers or gathering data for later publication. Classroom teachers, on the other hand, engage in reflective practice and teacher research as a feedback into classroom practice with the purpose of profes-

sional development for deeper understanding of practice. Naturally, these differing purposes influence the topics of research, the questions asked, the type of input sought, how it is gathered, and how it is analyzed and interpreted. These differing research processes will often result in very different kinds of output and/or displays of knowledge. In fact, the type of knowledge that is often most valued in higher education research communities can be seen as something alien to practitioners and, therefore, of low value.

Widdowson (2003) believes many teachers distrust theory because the prestige conferred on it by decision-makers in the field positions theory producers above those who struggle to use theory in practice. An obvious solution to this dilemma would be to encourage more teachers to become writers. Wharton (2008) has extensively researched the challenges faced by classroom teachers who desire to establish a dual identity as teacher and writer about teaching. She contends that,

Individuals who are willing to take on this dual identity provide the profession with an invaluable resource, that is, an accumulation of accounts written by people with expertise *both* in the practice of EL teaching, and in the theoretical practice of writing about it. (p. 228)

In one major international survey of teaching and learning, teachers rated individual and collaborative research as the most useful to benefit their professional development (OECD, 2008). However, the same study found that research engagement has one of the lowest teacher participation rates.

How Might We Approach Classroom Research Now?

As stated above, part of the dysfunction about the processes of theory creation and uptake in classroom practice is the conventions of academic discourse that have been created by university faculty who may teach and advise graduate students, but are often not teaching in language classrooms (see Clarke, 1994). In a recent study of research uptake by foreign language (non-English) teachers, Marsden and Kasproicz (2017) found that a major reason teachers cited for ignoring published research was that they could not understand it. Clarke sees the nature of this discourse as disabling because: “The voices of teachers are subordinated to the voices of others who are less centrally involved in language teaching ...[and] occupy positions of greater prestige than classroom language teachers” (p. 13).

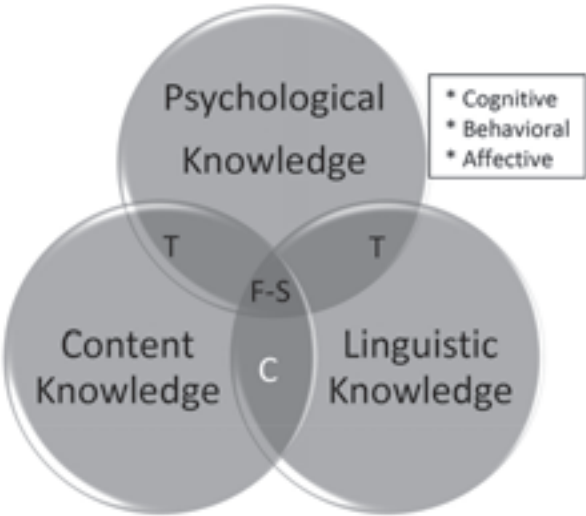
Many of the university faculty who publish in ELT journals began their careers teaching students in language classrooms, however, the common result of the system of promotion is “just as one acquires a position that encourages theoretical speculation and reflective practice, one is removed from day-to-day contact with the classroom realities that would make such efforts valuable” (Clarke, 1994, p. 13). In this section, I reflect on Wharton’s assertion above and try to point a way forward for classroom research done by language teachers.

Team Learning

In their research on the team teaching of English in Japanese schools, Tajino and Tajino (2000) spotted a unique learning dynamic in the interaction between people in a classroom – learning by teachers, students, and the entire group of participants. More recently, Tajino and Smith (2016, p. 12) argued for team learning in TESOL that “includes all of the participants

in a lesson”. Team learning is primarily based on the value of sharing knowledge (content, linguistic) with the goal of generating mutually-experienced learning that may leave deeper impressions than when students work independently. Student perspectives, which have often been left out of ELT research, are now valued more. While teacher perspectives are also more prominent in contemporary scholarly articles, the common assumption is still that teachers teach and students learn. Team learning, on the other hand, is a way of looking at practice as learning. It situates all participants in lessons as potentially being both teachers and learners (see Stewart, Dalsky, & Tajino, 2019).

In team learning, experiences of mutual learning occur as a result of value-centered practice. The central value anchoring the practice is sharing knowledge. The aim is to create a classroom environment that reflects the value of sharing knowledge. Teachers strive to structure lessons to induce engrossment in learning. The concept of team learning is liberating as it invites teachers to see themselves as co-participants in learning events in which identities comfortably shift between learner and teacher, directed by a value-centered goal of deepening understanding. The value of sharing knowledge is realized when roles are fluid and can be performed unselfconsciously. The practice consists of three main components: Psychological Knowledge, Content Knowledge, and Linguistic Knowledge.



Legend: T = lead instructional role transfer from teacher to students; F-S = role fluidity & synergy between lesson participants; C = communication

Figure 1. Components of Team Learning in Language Classroom

In Figure 1, the T indicates where role transfer takes place between teacher and students. At this overlap, decisions about content focus and related linguistic knowledge transfer from: teacher responsibility, to joint teacher-learner responsibility, to learner responsibility, and finally to the optimal state (F-S, the point at which the three components overlap) where all participants are unselfconsciously in “the learning moment”. Next, I briefly describe the theory

underlying the main components of the model. Readers who are interested in details about implementing team learning in practice should refer to Stewart, Dalsky, and Tajino (2019).

Communication: Content and linguistic knowledge. The model of classroom communication evident in team learning situations emphasizes dialogue and co-construction of knowledge that combines content and linguistic aspects. This sociocultural practice is based upon a theory of learning first formulated by Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky (2000) stressed the need for the creation of a collaborative community between teacher and student.

Yoshida (2016) demonstrated how sociocultural theory supports team learning in practice. He showed how interactions between two teachers of English engaged in team teaching, combined with the interactions of their learners to result in the effective creation of a zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 2000).

The main difference between team learning and concepts developed by sociocultural theorists such as ZPD and scaffolded learning (Bruner, 1986) is that the co-construction of knowledge is not only conceived as being mediated by a more mature participant (teacher) and a less mature participant (student). Students with higher linguistic proficiency and subject-area understanding can mentor classmates *and*, particularly in higher education, can take on the role of teacher at some points during lessons. In Figure 1, this is labeled F-S indicating the junctures at which the roles of student and teacher become fluid and at times allow participants to enter moments of synergy when all members are unselfconsciously engaged in an activity and learning something (see Stewart, Dalsky, & Tajino, 2019).

Kozulin (1998) looks at the creation of ZPD in schools as a space where specialized concepts and academic language blend with everyday ideas and language. It appears to be the size of the gap between what the teacher offers and what the students contribute that creates a classroom ZPD. In other words, if the gap is too small students will not be exposed to unknown language and if the gap is too wide, the level of the discourse might be too high for students to understand.

Psychological knowledge. The link between social interaction, emotion, cognition and learning proposed by Vygotsky is now backed by empirical research (The Aspen Institute, 2018; Dikker et al., 2017). To begin seeing themselves as co-participants in learning events requires teachers to employ a deeper level of mindfulness because “the management of learning [...] can only be accomplished by the learners and the teacher together” (Tarone & Allwright, 2005, p. 18). The teacher’s role as facilitator is crucial for success.

When assuming the role of facilitator, a mentor/teacher provides an appropriate level of assistance based upon real time understanding; this is what researchers of classroom interaction call *contingency*. The interactants are oriented toward collaboration and share an agenda of achieving communication. These types of interactions reflect the crucial affective aspect of team learning requiring the teacher to lower power distance.

In contingent interactions there is a sharedness of perspectives, which help ensure continued engagement. Contingent utterances are likely to relate new material to known material, set up expectancies for what may come next, validate (value and respect) both preceding and following utterances, and promote intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity tends to reduce overt power relations, since it requires “a constant oscillation between one’s own role as an actor ... and the role of one’s counterpart in interactions”. (Gibbons,

2007, p. 710)

Contingency is alternatively described as *synchronous* or *cooperative* interaction (Kasermann, 1991). That is, participants in interaction cooperate to achieve a common goal by working together on an activity. In this joint process of knowledge creation, social bonds of participants are strengthened as meaningful participation by students becomes possible through the synchronous interjections of the teacher. The teacher is alert to moments when learners need help to have their thoughts extended or expanded (not evaluated).

To sustain a state of being alert or mindful during lessons, teachers cannot overlook the issue of wait time as, “Increased wait time tends to lead to teachers asking fewer but more cognitively complex questions; they become more adept at using student responses (possibly because they have greater listening time)” (Gibbons, 2007, p. 712). This pedagogic move by teachers to use student responses as lesson content is a key aspect of team learning used to facilitate role transfer between teachers and students (see Figure 1).

Gibbons (2007) makes a strong case for academic language learning to involve *progressive discourse*. This kind of talk leads participants to enhance understandings. Echoing the concept of team learning, Gibbons cites van Lier (1996) to explain: “In contexts where the direction of the discourse and the relevance of contributions are jointly determined by the group, there is the potential to change learning situations and participant roles, and to create the possibilities for the direction of the discourse, and the agenda itself, to be shaped by all participants” (p. 712). This collaborative shaping of a lesson through role fluidity is central to the concept of team learning.

According to Gibbons (2007), the effectiveness of progressive discourse for classroom learning hinges on four requirements. First, exploratory talk in groups needs to go beyond sharing ideas and include critique and revision. Part of questioning ideas should include students learning how to “pose critical questions relating to their own lives” (p. 713). Second, teachers need to create a classroom environment “that encourages students to state opinions and engage with the ideas of others” (p. 713). The third point addresses the need to democratize speaking rights because: “Changing speaking roles and rights positions students as authoritative participants and constructs a very different identity from that which is constructed in discourse dominated by IRF exchanges” (p. 713). Finally, it is essential to teach language learners the language needed to hedge, interrupt politely, and disagree respectfully. Research indicates that this language (i.e., modality) is often not taught by teachers more concerned with academic concepts in the classroom (Gibbons, 2002). “However, if discourse is to be progressive, if it is to be the vehicle by which new ideas are co-constructed, and if in this process learners are to be constructed as interactants who have ideas worthy of attention, then teaching must also include the interpersonal aspects of language that will enable this to occur” (Gibbons, 2007, p. 713).

Team Learning and Classroom Research

The outline above of the theory behind team learning sets out possible agendas for both classroom implementation and simultaneous classroom research by language teachers. The research agenda is discovering how the above shifts can be achieved and documenting results. A teacher’s conscious process of working to prioritize their learner role over their teaching role, will require them to be mindful in new ways. Classroom teachers can research affective

factors such as: how their feelings, posture, facial expressions, and attitude affect the learning environment and student engagement. In addition, questions of allocating speaking rights, determining what information is valued and how it gets valued can be researched by classroom teachers. Other areas of research central to implementing team learning would be how to use student output skillfully as central to lessons, and how to manage reflection-in-action in ways that facilitate the creation of collective understanding.

Discussion

The problem with traditional second language education research done by outside experts observing classroom practice is that when the research is displayed (i.e., published as a journal article) it inevitably lacks an experiential understanding of the local context. This lack of in-depth socio-historical knowledge then forces the researcher to rely on highlighting generalized features of the classroom rather than what specifically drives the functioning of the particular classroom community. More concerning is the fact that once these studies are published in noted journals, their findings take on a normative status. In other words, the reported characteristics of supposedly more successful teaching-learning becomes reified as a model for all others to strive to replicate.

While collaborative research between teaching professionals and experts on research is gaining traction, it remains the case today, as Widdowson (1990, p. 47) put it so long ago, that: “Language teaching is often represented as a client activity, and language teachers as consumers of findings that are retailed by research. I believe this is a misrepresentation which denies the nature of teaching as a domain of theory and research in its own right” (see also Stewart, 2006).

Major applied journals in the field have explicitly stated in their mission and guidelines the desire to publish manuscripts that have relevance for classroom practitioners. The *TESOL Quarterly* “is committed to publishing manuscripts that contribute to bridging theory and practice in our profession” (2019a, n. p.). The publication focus of *The Modern Language Journal* involves “linking the findings of research to teaching and learning in a variety of settings and on all educational levels” (2019, n. p.). *Applied Linguistics* aims to publish “research into language with relevance to real-world issues” (2019, n. p.).

The differing values of researchers and classroom practitioners have resulted in the well-intentioned aims of journal editors to remain unrealized. Marsden and Kasprovicz (2017) found that foreign language teachers in the United Kingdom seldom, if ever, turn to the findings of published research to inform their practice. In ELT, Borg has conducted a number of surveys on teachers’ uptake of published research. For example, he conducted an international survey of 1,160 ESL/EFL teachers and found that 75% reported reading research-related material “sometimes” (Borg, 2010). However, the frequency of “sometimes” and the nature of the teachers’ reading was not specified.

In an attempt to address this issue, the TESOL International Association’s official research agenda calls for “increased emphasis on the agency of teachers as advocates for change inside and outside of their classrooms” (TESOL, 2014, p. 2). Agency is often defined as having the capacity to act and in sociology it is commonly contrasted with the concept of structure in debates about which is more important in shaping human activity. The ecological perspective on agency contends that it emerges from the interplay of individual capacity and social-material

conditions. In this view, even high capacity individuals can fail to achieve agency if the social conditions are not right (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015).

I believe that a primary pathway for English teachers to become “advocates for change inside and outside of their classrooms,” is through classroom research and publication. Yet, while pressures are building on classroom teachers to publish (Borg, 2013) and leading organizations and journals espouse their support for this empowerment of teachers, serious obstacles to this opening up of ELT research have been erected.

The *TESOL Quarterly* is a good example of the trend in limiting submissions to prestigious journals. The *TESOL Quarterly* (2019b, n. p.) guidelines for submissions to Reviews, the Forum, and Research and Teaching Issues now state that all contributions to these sections must be “invited”. How, then, does this recent move by the Association’s flagship journal promote its commitment to bridging theory and practice, as well as the Association’s research agenda of teachers becoming advocates for change inside and outside of classrooms? The fact is that the sections with these restrictions are the very sections that novice writers on classroom practice would be most likely to submit their work. Other prestigious journals in the field have similar restrictions stated in their submission guidelines. While the editorial boards of influential journals must deal with a heavy volume of submissions today, is limiting submissions via invitation mainly to well-known researchers a way to support the agency of teachers, or create echo-chambers?

If the majority of practitioners cannot access, do not understand, or do not trust the research being published, this sounds like a crisis. On top of this, if major journals restrict submissions to invited colleagues, even for sections dealing with issues of teaching practice, it is difficult to see how current research findings can influence practitioners. Most teachers simply do not have time to adapt the findings of research written in technical language into their practice. While attending conferences is commonly recommended to hear directly from researchers, the fees are often exorbitant for teachers without travel budgets. An alternative way for researchers to talk directly to practitioners would be to organize free workshops.

The research-publishing situation is definitely not helped by the funding crisis. Universities have become dependent on private funding since government austerity has been in vogue. Unfortunately, one of the costs of such dependence is less academic freedom for faculty when corporate interests are challenged by research results (see Woodhouse, 2009).

The pressure to publish continues to expand to a widening circle of practitioners. Meeting this demand is difficult for professionals who are more concerned with teaching. The growing demand to publish has resulted in a market solution – Open Access journals. While the concept of open access of scholarship is a worthy one, market forces have warped the original egalitarian vision of freely shared knowledge into yet another profit-maximization racket; Hence, the emergence of ‘predatory’ journals.

Economist Derek Pyne has been locked in a battle for his academic career since the publication of his article detailing the extent of scholars publishing in journals of questionable quality (Flaherty, 2018). Librarian Jeffrey Beall of the University of Colorado compiled a blacklist of over 10,000 such journals (“Beall’s list”, n. d.) and his career suffered after he posted this list on the Internet (Basken, 2017). While labelling a journal predatory is a judgement call, the temptation to submit manuscripts to marginal journals with questionable standards is under-

standable (Dooley & Sweeny, 2017).

Conclusion

With awareness that many journals do have a strong focus on the concerns of practitioners, this article deliberately ignores them based on the presumption that the theoretical knowledge base of ELT is largely created in select research journals. Creation and uptake of the knowledge base for ELT teaching/learning seems to boil down to the question of audience. Who does the researcher-author imagine would be interested to read their paper? More provocatively, who does the author need to impress with their paper? The answers to such questions will not only shape the research question and method, it will influence the discourse used by the researcher when writing for publication. The target audience will also influence the researcher's choice of journals to send their manuscript. This choice will no doubt be made to advance the career needs of the author. In the tightening liberal-arts job market, a key motivation to publish is promotion and retention in a college position.

If we take at face value the published mission statements of major journals in the ELT field, concern seems justified about how satisfying the target audience may actually devalue goals of achieving relevance to classroom practitioners. Observing the relationship between teaching and research in ELT from an ecological perspective, with teacher agency as a principal goal, indicates that the current social-material conditions for participation in knowledge creation are less than ideal. Access is surely tilted in favor of researchers who often no longer teach in second/foreign language classrooms. The problem is that an ecosystem thrives through the mutual enrichment of its various parts; in this case the potential feedback loop between classroom practice and the creation of valued knowledge. In the field of second/foreign language teaching, elevating the agency of classroom practitioners as theory builders needs to be approached more earnestly. Since both the engagement of reading published research and the process of doing classroom research have positive benefits for teachers, students and school communities (Bell, Cordingley, Isham, & Davis, 2010), language teachers should be given adequate support to read and write about practice.

Examining uptake first, there is a lot of interesting research being published in ELT journals that classroom teachers should read. The problem with a lot of the articles published in major research journals is that teachers find them unengaging because they are too abstract and unnecessarily opaque. In the contemporary ELT research community, emphasis is placed on enhancing reliability and validity of research. However, given the current publication infrastructure, there is no reason to believe that even research of higher quality will reach the large audience of practitioners.

A rather obvious and quite sensible suggestion for increasing the uptake of published research findings by classroom teachers was offered by Marsden and Kasprovicz (2017). Journal editors could require authors of pedagogically relevant papers to rewrite it as short (one-page) "lay summaries" which would be both conceptually and physically assessible to practitioners. Loading these summaries onto a well-maintained, searchable web site would go a long way toward improving the transparency and accessibility of published ELT research since, "Interested organizations, such as teacher associations, could then link to this one platform" (Marsden & Kasprovicz, p. 630). This would address the criticisms of elitism and "lack of

generosity” in communicating findings with teachers (Sato & Loewen, 2019, p. 5).

By reconsidering Freeman’s (1996) questions about who should tell the language classroom stories of practice and how they should be told, it is possible to envision a solution from what has traditionally been the consumer end of the process (i.e., classroom teachers). In response to the *TESOL Quarterly* research guidelines published in 2004, Shohamy asked: “What is the right way to do research, anyway?” (2004, p. 728). In her critique of the *correct* structure for reporting research, she concluded that in our digital age, “It would be useful if research guidelines encouraged researchers to present their results in more innovative ways” (p. 729). Opening up publication to new voices must be encouraged (see Stewart, 2017).

I end with a final look at the central question of knowledge creation through classroom research and publication. Teachers who want to better understand their practice and their students through classroom research have to overcome a number of obstacles (i.e., time, experience/expertise, resources, and support). For novices, a good way to start would be to work with a more experienced colleague. One example from Thailand is instructional. Maneekhao engaged in action research for the first time for both professional development and to contribute to the university’s curriculum renewal (Maneekhao & Todd, 2001). She worked with a mentor-colleague and kept a research journal. She was open about her lack of knowledge of the process: “I had no idea what research is like, how it is useful and did not want to know either” (p. 58). She was also honest about her sense of fear and confusion: “I am not a genius ... it is a blur” (p. 60). Her feelings match descriptions of the research process in the literature as “endless, painful, boring and time-consuming” (Brown & Rodgers, 2002). After completing her action research, things looked different to Maneekhao as she was able to step back and see the whole picture. She discovered that thankfully, research is not endless, although it is time-consuming and somewhat painful. However, when a teacher sees a project through to completion, something emerges from the fog of the struggle. She gained some clarity and learned that research is not boring since it tells practitioners a lot about what they are doing, why, and how it affects students and teachers themselves. In short, systematic classroom research can be a career changing experience.

Why revisit classroom research now? Issues in ELT about the creation and uptake of research have yet to be resolved. *Who are the practitioners?* More space needs to be opened for classroom teachers to contribute to discussions in the field since most of the theory on practice is produced by researchers who often no longer teach in language classrooms. *How might we approach classroom research now?* Opening professional space for classroom teachers has discursive and methodological aspects. Lowering the burden on teachers is important which means developing methods like team learning that might combine practice with research. To get more teacher engagement with research, it’s important to loosen the discourse conventions and use innovative displays of findings so that theory speaks to practitioners in ways they find convincing. These seem like ideas whose time has come.

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