Theoretical Analysis, Classroom Practice, Opinion Essays

Three Key Problems in Classroom Language Education Research

Andy Curtis
City University of Macau

Abstract

This opinion essay begins by describing the problematic difference between "doing-research-on" and "doing-research-with," particularly in relation to classroom-based research on foreign/English language teaching and learning. In "doing-research-on," the researchers are the primary beneficiaries of the research they publish, whilst those who provided the data, the researched—in this case, the teachers and the students—typically do not benefit from the research published. However, when research is done *with* the data-providers, such as teachers and/or students, all parties can benefit from the research, even if not to the same extent and not in the same ways. In the second part of this opinion piece, the publish-or-perish problem is acknowledged, with a brief consideration of how it has been shaping research and publishing for nearly a century. The third part of this opinion essay draws on "trickle down" economic theory to discuss some of the reasons the findings from published research in our field so rarely seem to feed back into the classrooms from which the data were gathered. In the last part of this opinion piece, I propose some ways of addressing these problems, with specific experiential examples.

The "Doing-Research-On" vs. "Doing-Research-With" Problem

Before we begin, a couple of clarification points need to be made here. First, although I refer to "universities" in this essay—as the vast majority of what is published on our field is written by university professors—I am including any tertiary education institutions, such as some colleges, in which academic staff are expected to carry out and publish research as part of their contractual obligations. Second, although most university professors, as well as carrying out and publishing research, also teach courses, those courses are typically taught in universities to university undergraduate or graduate students. However, when I refer to "busy classroom teachers," I am referring to a markedly different professional demographic of teachers whose main roles and responsibilities revolve around classroom teaching.

At the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) International Association (TIA) 2023 international convention in Portland, Oregon, several high-profile presentations were given, many based on recent book publications, which highlighted and reiterated the importance of English language classrooms, learners, and teachers. However, in my experience—around 200 mostly TESOL-related publications over 30 years, and having served on a variety of TIA boards and task forces—I believe that those presentations are, at most, only *half right* about the findings coming out of and feeding back into the language classroom. Only half right because, while the data on which those publications are based do indeed come from classrooms, teachers, and students, how those parties benefit from such publications—in a clear, concrete, and timely manner—is not at all clear.

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Furthermore, I believe that few of the classroom teachers and learners who kindly provided all those data—without which there would be no such publications—rarely (if ever) benefit, directly or even indirectly, from such publications (Curtis, 2023). If that is the case, then a key question is: If not for classroom teachers, then who is this classroom-based research being written for? The answer appears to be that researchers in our field (and in other fields) are, in fact, writing for other researchers, in spite of claims that the research that comes out of the (language) classroom feeds back into it. A corollary question regarding the readership of such research is: If language education researchers are mostly writing for each other, then how can the providers of the classroom data (the teachers and the students) benefit from this kind of research?

This disconnect can be referred to as a problem of readership-in-reality vs. purported readership, i.e., professional researchers (typically in universities) vs. busy classroom (language) teachers. More than 30 years ago, in 1990, Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle published, in the *Educational Researcher*, a paper titled, "Research on Teaching and Teacher Research: The Issues That Divide." They started their short paper by expressing their concerns that:

> Limiting the official knowledge base for teaching to what *academics have chosen to study and write about* has contributed to a number of problems, including *discontinuity* between what is taught in universities and what is taught in classrooms, teachers' *ambivalence* about the claims of academic research, and a general lack of information about classroom life from a truly *emic perspective* (p. 2, emphases added).

Given the intervening decades since that 1990 paper, an important question becomes: What, if anything, has changed between now and then regarding, for example, what academics choose to write about, the disparities highlighted, the ambivalences, the etic-emic (outsider/insider) perspective problems, etc.? And while we would like to believe that the teaching-research divide identified by Cochran-Smith and Lytle has narrowed, that the gap has gotten smaller, it is still the case that it is (very) rare that the teachers and the students in the classroom decide what gets researched and what gets published. That is, instead, decided by other researchers, journal editors, grant-reviewing bodies, panels on professorial employment, promotion, tenure, etc. For example, if some journal editors decide to publish a special issue on, say, task-based language teaching and learning, translanguaging, social-emotional concerns, artificial intelligence, the latest iteration of ChatGPT, etc., then that is what research will be carried out, and that is what research will be published. Driving the business end of that income-generating, professorial career-building cycle is the publishers—not only of those journals, but also of the books and book series that either follow or precede the journal publications. Might it not, then, be healthier for all parties if we just openly and honestly admitted that we, the researchers and our domains of disciplinary knowledge, are as susceptible to fashions and fads as any other industry?

A few years after Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990), Kenneth Zeichner looked "Beyond the Divide of Teacher Research and Academic Research" (1995, pp. 153–172), and found that: "Currently [28 years ago] many teachers feel that educational research conducted by those in the academy is *largely irrelevant to their lives in schools*. On the other hand, many academics dismiss the knowledge produced through teacher research as trivial and inconsequential to their work" (p. 153, emphasis added). The same question asked of the Cochran-Smith and Lytle paper can be—and I believe should be—asked here too, i.e.: What, if anything, has changed since then? It is, of course, important to manage one's cynicism regarding deep-level, long-term, meaningful and fundamental changes in (language) education (or the lack thereof). Nevertheless, in this regard, one can be forgiven for recalling the line attributed to the French writer, Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr (1808–1890) in 1849, in his self-published satirical magazine. In the original French, Karr wrote "plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose," literally translated into English as "the more it changes, the more it's the same thing" but more commonly rendered as "the more things change, the more they stay the same."

And while language education researchers who rely on classroom data may no longer "dismiss the knowledge produced through teacher research as trivial and inconsequential to their work," there is still the essential question of how relevant to the day-to-day lives of teachers and students in school is the research published, even when it describes itself as "classroom-based"? Authors of another paper from decades ago, adjacent to language education, in music education, asked: "Interdisciplinary Curriculum: Music Educator Concerns: What is interdisciplinary learning? Does it work better than traditional subject-area learning? *Who really benefits?*" (Wiggins, 2001, p. 40, emphasis added). The somewhat cumbersome 20-word title culminates in the same question I have found myself asking at more and more conventions and conferences—as well as whilst reading several hundred published papers in our field (and in many others) over the last 30-plus years: *Who really benefits from these academic presentations and publications?*

A fourth example, also from the dawn of the new millennium, asked another question in the same vein, in this case, more specifically regarding publications by faculty members in marketing departments: "Who Are We *Really* Talking To?" (McKenzie et al., 2002, p. 1196, emphasis added). The authors found that the majority of the marketing professionals they surveyed "neither read nor recognized ... the great bulk" of the papers in their field published in academic journals, and they concluded that "whatever efforts are made by marketing faculty to publish their work, their readership, most likely, will be *disappointingly exclusive*" (McKenzie et al., 2002, p. 1196, emphasis added). The emphasizing of the titular "really" is to underscore the point that publications in our field (and others) that are claimed to be for the benefit of busy classroom teachers and their students may be published primarily for many other reasons, such as employment, annual academic reviews, promotion, tenure, performance-pay bonuses, grant applications, etc. And whilst all of those may be perfectly valid reasons for publishing papers, books, etc., it would be disingenuous of us to hide those reasons behind claims that we do what we do for the benefit of busy classroom teachers and students.

The "Publish or Perish" Problem

According to Seema Rawat and Sanjay Meena (2014, p. 87) the phrase "publish or perish" (PoP) can be traced back to the Harvard University history professor, Archibald Cary Coolidge (1866–1928), who served as the first director of the Harvard University Library and the editor-in-chief of the policy journal *Foreign Affairs*, and who apparently coined the term "publish or perish," which subsequently found its way into print in the early 1930s in a book written about his life (Coolidge & Lord, 1932). At that time, and for a long time afterwards, the PoP phrase was considered to be an encouragement to scholars to publish the findings of their research in respected and recognized academic journals—and as an admonishment or a warning to those scholars who did not do so. However, in more recent decades, that 90-year-old PoP mantra has been increasingly questioned, across a number of disciplinary areas. For example, in 1986, in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, Marcia Angell, lamented the fact that: "Because promotion and funding of physicians in academic medicine are closely linked to the number of their publications, investigators feel impelled to publish as frequently as possible" (p. 261). Angell warned that, as a result of PoP pressures: "a number of unfortunate practices in medical publishing [occur] including undertaking trivial studies because they yield rapid results, needlessly reporting the same study in installments, reporting a study more than once, and listing as authors people only marginally involved in the study" (p. 261). Angell went so far as to suggest that such pressures may even "be a motivation for fraud" (p. 261), marking such behaviour as borderline criminal.

More recently, Gideon Parchomovsky (2000) discussed the challenges of PoP in relation to "the economic and legal rules of patent law" (p. 961). And in the area of management studies, in an article titled, "Publish or Perish: Bane or Boon of Academic Life?" Mark De Rond and Alan Miller (2005) reminded us that: "There are few more familiar aphorisms in the academic community than 'publish or perish.' Venerated by many and dreaded by more" (p. 321), discreetly and deftly alluding to the fear-factor behind the phrase. Based on a quick review of publications beyond our field of language teaching and learning, the fields of medicine and law appear to have been more willing to challenge the PoP orthodoxy. For example, in 2008, in the *Journal of Clinical Investigation*, in an article titled, "Publish or Perish, But at What Cost?" Ushma Neill wrote that: "Under pressure to generate voluminous output, scientists often fall prey to double publishing, self-plagiarism, and submitting the 'minimal publishable unit.' Are these ethical gray areas, or true transgressions?" (p. 2368). Neill considered, and responded to, a number of related questions: "Is publishing the same set of data twice acceptable (clearly not), is using the same text in several articles plagiarism (perhaps), and is publishing newly obtained data after the fact acceptable (maybe)?" (p. 2368). Papers such as these (by Angell [1986], De Rond & Miller [2005], Neill [2008], and others) show that one of the reasons for the "doing-research-on" vs. "doing-research-with" problem is the PoP problem, which may drive researchers to behave in more self-serving ways in which the publications are seen more as a means to an end, rather than as ways of informing and improving (in our case) language teaching and learning in the classroom.

However, in "Revisiting Publish or Perish" (Bond, 2023), rather than revisiting the PoP driving-force, as the title of her paper leads us to believe, Bond reinforced its dominance, writing that PoP: "has been *widely adopted* by academic institutions as a tool *to incentivise* individual staff members to publish scholarly articles to enhance both their *own reputation and career progression*, and thereby the reputation of *the institution itself*" (p. 1, emphases added). As Bond's paper was published in a pharmaceutical journal, there is a striking absence of any reference to those who provide the data for such publications, i.e., the patients who take the drugs dispensed by the pharmacists. Bond concluded that, in 2023: "With the increasing use of publications in *performance indicators for academic staff* as they progress through promotion rounds, and for *institutions themselves* as they compete with each other in ranking tables and for government funding, the expression is probably *as true today as ever*" (Bond, 2023, p. 1, emphases added). Whilst that may still be so in Bond's field of pharmacy, there are some encouraging signs that things may be changing elsewhere.

For example, also in 2023, in *Higher Education Research & Development*, Nomanesi Madikizela-Madiya (at the University of South Africa, in Pretoria) reported on: "Transforming higher education spaces through ethical research publication" in her "critique of the publish or perish aphorism" (pp. 186–199). And while Madikizela-Madiya acknowledged that PoP publishing is "a condition for survival in academe," she also stated that PoP: "resonates with the imperatives of neoliberalism that privilege individual success, entrepreneurship, prestige, promotion (self- and institutional) and monetary gain" (p. 186), reiterating, although negatively, some of the points made by Bond (2023). As noted above, McKenzie et al. (2002) concluded that: "whatever efforts are made by marketing faculty to publish their work, their readership, most likely, will be disappointingly *exclusive*" (p. 1196, emphasis added), with which Madikizela-Madiya concurred, describing PoP as "*exclusionary* for survival of academics [with] ethical and social justice implications" (p. 186). Madikizela-Madiya (2023) described PoP publishing as "exclusionary" on the grounds that "research processes are unethical because research participants are not informed of the exclusionary nature of publications," adding that "the supposed contribution of research and publication for societal good is marginalised as academics try to find shortcuts to publish for their professional survival" (p. 186). Madikizela-Madiya (2023) concluded that: "the publish or perish dictum elides social justice issues and undermines academic identities, and the dignity of *the communities from which data are extracted* are at [*sic*] jeopardy" (p. 186, emphasis added). And whilst Madikizela-Madiya's position on PoP appears to be more extreme than mine, she and I share the same concern for the classroom teachers and learners, who provide the data for the publications that benefit those who publish, without benefitting those without whom there would be no such publications.

I will conclude this brief review of some of the PoP literature from different disciplines, from the 1980s to the 2020s, with another 2023 publication, "Publish or Perish? How Legal Regulations Affect Scholars' Publishing Strategies and The Spending of Public Funds by Universities," by Musiał-Karg et al., who criticize the "the use of public money on publishing in predatory journals" and the "acceptance of this kind of publishing" (p. 1). The rise of so-called "predatory journals" is beyond the scope of this piece, but it seems clear that PoP pressures are one of the driving forces behind this rise (see, for example, Bartholomew, 2014; Desmir, 2018; Richtig et al., 2018).

The Trickle-Down Problem in Classroom Language Teaching-Learning Research

So-called "Trickle-Down Economics" (TDE) is based on the idea that if certain countries, corporations, and individuals accumulate great wealth, then that wealth will, eventually, trickle-down to the masses, thereby benefitting everyone. Looking at the socio-economic, educational, and other inequities around the world today, this has clearly not been the case. In fact, on the contrary, the rich appear to have gotten even richer and the poor even poorer during the years of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic (see, for example, Lu, 2022). Some right-wing economists, billionaires, and political leaders still cling to the idea of TDE, even though it has been debunked and discredited for at least 40 years. For example, in 1983, the economist Heinz Arndt vigorously stated that: '"Trickle-down' is a myth which should be exposed and laid to rest. No reputable developmental economist ever, explicitly or implicitly, endorsed any such theory in any of its various alleged versions" (p. 1). Decades later, Antonia Juhasz (2002), reporting on "The Failure of Globalisation" (pp. 407–420), more than 20 years ago, explained that:

> At the heart of the globalisation model is a commitment to global corporations acting as the engines of economic growth and a belief that the wealth they create will trickle down to the rest of society. Instead, its policies lock wealth at the top ... decreasing access of developing countries to the tools necessary to improve their social condition and strangling democracy” (p. 407).

Yet, in spite of decades of economic data showing clearly and conclusively that TDE only benefit the already-richest countries, corporations, and individuals, the myth persists. For example, in 2023, Wright-Maley et al., in the title of their article, referred to the “Trickle-Down Lie that Just Won’t Die” (pp. 1–20), describing TDE as “a fallacious metaphor that hurts working people and the civic commons” (p. 1), and referring to publicly-funded places and spaces for local communities to come together, such as libraries, parks, community centres, etc.

The pernicious persistence of the TDE myth reminds me of the “native-speaker myth” in our field, although we, at least, appear to have made much more progress in this area than some economists and politicians have regarding the TDE myth (see Holliday, 2006, for an introduction to native-speakerism). However, it does appear that we may have our own trickle-down problem of assumptions in foreign language education research, in which we assume, for example, the following, positive pattern. Researchers collect classroom data from teachers and students, which they then analyze, write up, and publish, thereby embellishing their CVs, and increasing their chances of employment, tenure, promotion, etc. The teacher whose classroom was the source of that data then reads the published paper, as a result of which, the quantity and quality of teaching and learning in the classroom improves. I know I am not the only person in our field who sees the glaring problems with such assumptions, which are, at best, convenient, and at worst, simply naïve. But why do such positive patterns and virtuous cycles appear not to happen? (at least, nowhere near as often as we might hope or like to assume).

It has been a humbling, enlightening, and deeply enriching experience to be able to meet with (face-to-face and online) thousands of TESOL professionals from around the world (in their home countries, and elsewhere, such as at conferences and conventions) over the last 30 years. During those encounters, there are a number of topics that I regularly ask the teachers about, including questions about research, mainly related to whether or not they do research themselves (and why/why not), and if they read the published research of others (and again, why or why not). Most of the classroom language teachers I have met neither carry out research nor read research, most often citing lack of time as one reason for not engaging with or in the research in our field. However, time has become an almost automatic answer to any question about anything that we believe we should be doing, such as eating more healthily and/or doing more exercise, but which we are not doing: No time! Not enough time! Need more time!

Fortunately, before COVID-19, most of my international conversations with classroom teachers were in-person, face-to-face, and mask-less. And perhaps one of the areas in which online conferences can never replace in-person gatherings is the unplanned and incidental interactions between conference attendees/participants, which is where and when some of the most interesting and important discussions can happen. (Unfortunately, people cannot “bump into each other” online, no matter how many virtual breakout rooms we create.) And it has been during these “asides” when teachers have told me that, in addition to the problem of never-enough time, there are other reasons for them neither carrying out nor reading research. Regarding teachers not carrying out research, the main recurring reasons told to me (apart from time) include lack of research methodology expertise, lack of access to data-gathering, and lack of data-analyzing hardware and software. Teachers also shared not being given permission by their institutions to gather classroom data and the fact that the schools where they taught did not value such research, even if it was published. In a significant number of schools, such research was even discouraged, as it was seen as "a distraction" from the business of teaching and learning. However, over the decades of having these discussions, more schools in more places seem to be appreciating it when their teachers present at conferences, whether local, national, or international, partly because this helps to raise the profile of the school/college in ways that a published paper may not. In addition to these discussions, there are data to support what teachers have told us about the challenges they face when attempting to carry out research. For example, in the recent *TESOL RPC Research Priorities Survey 2022: Report on Findings* (Douglas & Marshall, 2023), nearly 1,000 TESOL professionals responded to the question about "Challenges to Carrying Out Research" (p. 9). The largest group of responses was "miscellaneous," with approximately 21% (211 out of 979), but the next three highest challenges were: "Research Design" (147/15%); "Funding" (115/11.7%); and "Workload" (110/11.2%).

Regarding not reading research, many teachers concurred with the findings of Zeichner (1995), discussed above, who found that: "Currently many teachers feel that educational research conducted by those in the academy is largely irrelevant to their lives in schools" (p. 153). The teachers who have talked with me, as professional language educators, noticed that the language used in the publications—including those that were based on data from their own classrooms—was the language of researchers writing for each other, and therefore typically more technical and not teacher-friendly. Some teachers also noticed that the more prestigious the journals appeared to be, the less accessible the language was for readers whose working lives are spent mostly in classrooms. Fortunately, in more recent years, work has been published on, for example, bridging "the teaching English as a second language (TESL) research-practice gap by fostering the formation of and supporting professional learning communities (PLCs) in adult ESL instructional contexts" (Abbot et al., 2018, p. 1). Also addressing this specific challenge, Abbott et al. (2021) "facilitated the establishment of and supported professional reading groups in nine adult [English as a second language] ESL programs" (p. 3), and after five years with more than 70 participants, they found that "despite the challenges reported, reading group involvement promoted reflection, confirmed current professional practices, fostered learning, impacted practice, emphasized the importance of professional development, and encouraged networking" (p. 3). (For more on these reading groups, see Lee & Abbott, 2021, and Abbott & Lee, 2022)

What Can We Do About These Problems in Classroom Language Education Research?

We have, so far, identified and discussed three problems with classroom-based language-teaching learning research and the publications that result. To start with the first problem, a recent, powerful example of "doing-research-with" rather than "doing-research-on" was published in June 2023 in the *TESOL Journal* (which is published by the TIA). The article is titled, "Podcasting for Peace: Resettled Refugee Youths' Self-Sponsored Counter-Storytelling Practices," and the first author is Professor Megan Heise at the Indiana University of

Pennsylvania. However, the second author, Asifa Hassan, is not a university professor, but one of "the four young refugee women between the ages of 17 and 23 resettled in Germany ... who created a multimodal, English-language podcast during the pandemic called 'Now You Hear Us' (NYHU) (Youth Unmuted, 2020)" (Heise & Hasan, 2023, p. 1). According to the "About Us" page of the "Youth Unmuted" website, their vision is of: "A world in which the voice of every young person is elevated and valued, enabling youth to act as agents of change within their own lives and communities." They described their mission as "Empowering Youth" based on the belief that "every young person deserves to be heard, particularly those who are marginalized and have been forgotten by global audiences. We seek to empower these young people and elevate their voices by creating an online platform to showcase their creativity, and share their voices with the world." The first of the NYHU podcasts was launched on YouTube in July 2020, and as of November 2023, the 20-minute video (voice only) had been viewed more than 600 times. This short (four-page) paper by Heise and Hasan shows that equal-partnership collaborations can take place, not only between professional researchers and classroom teachers but also, in this case, between the English as an additional language (EAL) students themselves and university-based researchers. However, such researcher-teacher collaborations are still rare, as, for example, almost all of the 50+ authors of papers published in the first three 2023 issues of the *TESOL Journal* in 2023 (up to and including September 2023) are university professors.

There is currently little that can be done about the second problem identified, the PoP problem—at least, not until universities stop relying on "research output" as a key criterion for employment, promotion, tenure, awarding of research grants, etc. However, a step in the right direction would be for some of the most influential universities to recognize publications of the kind that are not usually counted. For example, all of the interest sections of the TIA and all of the special interest groups of the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL) regularly publish newsletters, which contain shorter articles that are more practically oriented, written in more accessible language, and which can be read by busy classroom language teachers with limited time. Similarly, the TIA has approximately 100 affiliates all over the world, most of which also publish newsletters of the kind described above. Douglas (2016, 2017, 2019) has written extensively about how journals such as this *BC TEAL Journal* can help bridge the on-going gap between everyday foreign/English language teaching and learning and the mostly university-based communities of professors. For example, in the inaugural issue the editor stated that the journal "aligns with BC TEAL's mission statement and commitment to support research and encourage professional development throughout the province" (Douglas, 2016, p. i). For more details on addressing this particular challenge, see "Free and Open Access: How English Language Teaching Associations Can Foster the Dissemination of Knowledge Through Scholarly Journals," (Douglas, 2017); "Scholar-Practitioners Contributing to the English as an Additional Language Teaching and Learning Community's Knowledge Resources," (Douglas, 2019), and "Publishing Across the Affiliate Lines: TESOL Journals in Conversation," (Alatriste et al., 2020). More examples of recent and relevant work are Smythe et al.'s (2021) paper on "inventive pedagogies and social solidarity" in relation to "the work of community-based adult educators during COVID-19 in British Columbia" (p. 9). There is also the work of Macintyre Latta et al. (2017), who brought together a community to "form the workings of the renewed teacher education program at UBC Okanagan, purposefully bringing practitioners and researchers together and, thus, theory and practice together" (p. 32). And in relation to this particular opinion piece, it is especially interesting that

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Macintyre Latta et al. (2017) stated clearly and concisely: “The separation of practitioners from researchers, theory from practice, is documented for over 100 years in the research literature as being unproductive” (p. 32).

In addition to the work of Douglas (2016, 2017, 2019) and others in British Columbia, many other practically-oriented and teacher-friendly articles are published in journals such as the *TESL Canada Journal*. For example, Katari reported (2018) on the “efficacy of academic reading strategy instruction among adult English as an additional language students” in British Columbia, which aimed to “address the practical concerns of academic English teaching professionals regarding the use of reading strategies while providing action research practitioners with suggestions to implement. implemented in the future” (p. 78). And the interest in bridging the gaps between research and classroom practice continues to this day. For example, Resch and Schrittesser (2023) used service-learning “to bridge the gap between theory and practice in teacher education” (p. 1118) in the Austrian context, and in the Pakistani context, Anwer and Reiss (2023) presented the views of “expert researchers in the field” on “linking research and practice in education” p. 326). All of these articles show that, in spite of pressures to publish in so-called “top-tier” journals that are rarely read by anyone expect other (university) researchers, it is perfectly possible to publish articles that are of practical use to busy classroom teachers, even if they are not as highly regarded within the narrow confines of Academia.

Another step in the right direction would be for universities to go beyond their usual measures of the “impact” of the journals they recognize, which is usually based on how many times articles in a particular journal are cited in other articles/journals by other researchers. For example, the University of Illinois at Chicago’s *Research Guide* explains that: “The impact factor (IF) is a measure of the frequency with which the average article in a journal has been cited in a particular year. It is used to measure the importance or rank of a journal by calculating the times its articles are cited.” However, this kind of impact measurement only counts researcher-to-researcher information exchange, which may only exacerbate the problem of researchers claiming to be writing for a wider audience, but in reality, mainly/only writing for other researchers. Likewise, the number of times a particular article has been downloaded says nothing about who read the article, but again, it is most likely to be other researchers working in the same or similar areas. However, if, for example, a TIA or IATEFL newsletter article was read by hundreds of teachers in dozens of countries (which would not be unusual), is that not an impact worth at least taking into account?

The third problem identified was the fact that research findings and output, especially in the form of published papers in academic journals, are not “trickling down” back into classrooms in ways that benefit teachers and students. That problem is partly a by-product of the first two problems: researchers writing for each other (whatever they may claim about their broader readership) and the PoP problem, in which researchers are under pressure to publish as much as they can as quickly as they can, especially pre-tenure (in tertiary education systems which are tenure-track based). And although there are some examples of professorial and non-professorial co-authored articles, those are still rare, and more professional researcher-classroom teacher co-authoring and co-presenting would help to address that third problem. Maybe, one day, there will be editors of academic journals, books, and book series who spend most of their time teaching K–12 students in schools. However, the time required to be such an editor, and the time required to be a classroom teacher, are currently too much for any individual. But it is possible to envisage an arrangement in which, for example, a special issue of a journal focused on classroom foreign/English teaching and learning invited some classroom teachers—maybe those who provided the data on which the publications in the special issue are based—to be guest co-editors.

In the meantime, here are some low-key, low-tech, low-cost things that I have been doing for many years now, but which often appear to have been greatly appreciated by the teachers who helped me, although not usually within the traditional university system. In addition to co-authoring published articles and co-presenting with classroom teachers at conferences, I write an official (on university letterhead) thank you letter to the teachers who allowed me to be in their classes, and/or who gave me permission to (and helped to) gather the classroom data on which any publication of mine is based. I also send an official thank you letter to the school principals (a copy of which is sent to the teachers) and write a simple thank you card to the students, which the teachers share with them. And depending on the context and the publication, it is possible to include, at the end of the published paper, a brief acknowledgment and thanks, not to the particular school(s) involved (to preserve anonymity) but to the school district. Also, when I have been allowed to gather data from classrooms that are short on school supplies, such as papers, pencils, pens, notebooks, etc., to show my appreciation, I buy some of those supplies for those teachers and learners (sometimes using research funding, but at other times, funded out of my own pocket). And again, depending on the context, I offer to take some of the school teachers (and their colleagues) who helped me somewhere local for a simple meal, usually lunch, but if we are celebrating, then a dinner is usually in order. As noted above, none of these ways of giving back and showing our appreciation are high-profile, high-tech, or expensive (in monetary terms). Indeed, when I review grant applications in our field, asking for hundreds of thousands, or even millions, of Canadian dollars in funding—based on published research using data from classroom teachers and learners—whatever the costs of these kinds of things is negligible by comparison. These are just some examples of the ways in which researchers can help classroom teachers and their learners feel appreciated, respected, and included, in ways that are practical and meaningful.

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