

# 1. SLA research and L2 pedagogy: An uneasy relationship<sup>2</sup>

Nina Spada

## Introduction

Both second language acquisition (SLA) research and L2 pedagogy are subfields of Applied Linguistics. SLA is primarily concerned with the learning of second/additional languages that are learned after the acquisition of a first language (L1). The emphasis in SLA is on learning, the processes that are associated with it, and the factors that contribute to more or less successful learning. The focus of much of SLA research has been the learning of grammar, but it also includes the learning of lexical, pragmatic, and phonological features of language. L2 pedagogy is primarily concerned with theory, research and practice related to the teaching of second/additional languages. On the surface, there is an obvious connection between SLA and L2 pedagogy based on the assumption that the more we know about how languages are learned the better informed we will be about how to best teach them. The relationship between the two is more complicated than this, however, which is why the question *Should SLA research be relevant to L2 pedagogy?* has been responded to in different ways and is the source of considerable debate in the applied linguistics literature. For example, some scholars respond to this question with *Yes*,

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*absolutely*; others say *No, not necessarily* and still others claim that *It depends*.

Those who say *Yes, absolutely* argue that SLA is a subfield of applied linguistics which is dedicated to the study of real-world problems in which language plays a role. Therefore, SLA should have direct relevance to L2 pedagogy (Brumfit, 1997; Bygate, 2005). Those who say *No, not necessarily* argue that there are several areas of SLA research that are not relevant to L2 pedagogy, for example, naturalistic acquisition, theory development, methodological issues, as well as the nature/focus of some of the research questions investigated. This becomes evident when one takes a random look at articles published in recent mainstream SLA journals with titles such as: “*Establishing evidence of learning in experiments employing artificial linguistic systems*” (Hamrick & Sachs, 2018) and “*Investigating auditory processing of syntactic gaps with L2 speakers using pupillometry*” (Fernandez et al., 2018). In cases like these it is difficult to argue that the research is directly relevant to L2 teaching, nor is it necessary or appropriate to do so. Evelyn Hatch acknowledged the need to distinguish between SLA and L2 pedagogy over 40 years ago when the field of SLA was just developing. At that time, most researchers came to SLA as language teachers, and they were highly motivated to make connections between research and teaching. In her article entitled “*Apply with Caution*”, Hatch claimed that much of SLA is not directly relevant to how languages can be best taught in L2 classrooms and argued that “The only question the researcher should answer is the one he/she asks” (Hatch, 1979, p. 138).

Since then SLA has evolved and grown considerably; it has become a multi-faceted and interdisciplinary field (see Gass et al., 2013 & Ortega, 2009 for overviews of SLA theory and research). This includes investigations of internal/learner factors for example: cognitive (memory, aptitude), biological (learners’ age) linguistic (learners’ other languages), affective (learners’ identity, motivation). It also includes investigations of external factors such as the linguistic environment inside the classroom (teacher talk; learner interaction); the characteristics of exposure to the L2 through study abroad programs and the use of technology

inside and outside the classroom. SLA also encompasses a diverse range of theoretical perspectives. While the field has been primarily influenced by a wide range of linguistic and psychological theories, recent years have seen an increase in social (Block, 2003) and multilingual (May, 2014) perspectives, and transdisciplinary frameworks for conceptualizing the complex and multidimensional aspects of language development (Douglas Fir Group, 2016). Greater epistemological diversity is also evident as qualitative, interpretive research methodologies emerge alongside quantitative, experimental approaches that have dominated SLA since its inception.

Within the broader discipline of SLA, subfields have developed which have more direct relevance for L2 teaching. This is what has led some scholars to respond to the question *Should SLA be relevant to L2 pedagogy?* with *It depends*. Two that are considered particularly relevant to L2 pedagogy are: Instructed SLA and L2 classroom research. Instructed SLA is concerned with “Language acquisition in classrooms, language laboratories, or other settings where language is intentionally taught and/or intentionally learned” (Spada & Lightbown, 2013, p. 1). Instructed SLA “attempts to answer two questions: 1) is instruction beneficial for second language (L2) learning and 2) if so, how can the effectiveness of instruction be optimized?” (Loewen, 2015, p. 1). For many years instructed SLA has been carried out within a cognitive-linguistic perspective of L2 learning. The last two decades have seen a steady increase in instructed SLA research conducted within a socio-cultural perspective (Lantolf et al., 2018). Some specific questions that have motivated instructed SLA research include: 1) How does instructed SLA compare with naturalistic SLA? 2) Is explicit instruction more effective than implicit instruction? 3) What type of knowledge results from instruction? 4) Are some corrective feedback types more effective for L2 learning than others? 5) Is L2 instruction more effective for the development of certain language features?

L2 classroom-research examines similar questions about the relationship between the teaching and learning of languages (Chaudron, 1988; Ellis, 2012; Spada, 2019) in descriptive and quasi-experimental studies. It differs from instructed SLA in that

the research takes place exclusively in classrooms. This has often resulted in more detailed descriptions of the characteristics of L2 instruction in what is referred to as process-product research (Long, 1980/1983; Spada, 2019). It is argued that there is greater “ecological validity” that comes with L2 classroom research. This refers to the “degree of similarity between a research study and the authentic context that the study is purportedly investigating” (Loewen & Plonsky, 2016, p. 56). It is believed that teachers are more likely to value research that takes place in real classrooms with real learners and teachers. This does not mean that instructed SLA research carried out in laboratories cannot be useful for teaching, but that research carried out in actual classrooms carries more weight for teachers. Of course, the application of findings from L2 classroom research does not guarantee that they will lead to improved learning outcomes because of fundamental differences between the research and educational context.

Even though both instructed SLA and L2 classroom research are more applied and investigate questions of greater relevance to L2 pedagogy, the gap remains between SLA research and L2 pedagogy. Why is this so? Below we discuss some of the reasons for this gap from both the teachers’ and researchers’ perspectives.

### **Why this gap? Teachers’ perspectives**

One of the explanations that is frequently offered for the gap between SLA research and L2 pedagogy is that teachers do not have time to read research journals and when they do, the articles are often too technical and inaccessible as reflected in the following quotes: *In my own [school] context almost nobody reads TESOL publications—they don’t have time.* (Borg, 2006); *I need somebody to interpret for me what [the researchers] are trying to say ...* (Gore & Gitlin, 2004). It has also been observed that when teachers read articles in teachers’ journals or newsletters little research is actually reported in them. In a review of 5 years of publications in 4 professional association journals and newsletters targeted to language teachers in the UK, Australia and the US, Marsden & Kaspruwicz (2017) found that more than a third of the articles did not include references to research. It has also

been reported that some teachers are skeptical about researchers' knowledge about language teaching as indicated in the following statement by an ESL teacher: *the nerve some "experts" have, to go waltzing into teachers' classrooms with their PhDs, having never been public school teachers themselves, and tell these seasoned professionals... what they should do in their classes* (Kerekcs, 2001).

Teachers' doubts about whether research is relevant to classroom teaching and learning are understandable. In a review of articles published in 2 mainstream SLA journals (*Studies in Second Language Acquisition & Language Learning*) from 1990 to 2010, laboratory studies were found to outnumber classroom studies by 3 to 1 (Plonsky, 2013). Again, this is not to suggest that lab studies are not relevant for teaching but that the findings from laboratory and classroom studies often differ. One important example of this emerged in research on the *negotiation of meaning*. This term refers to adjustments that are made in the speech of L2 learners (and other speakers) when breakdowns in communication occur. These linguistic adjustments include requests for repetition, comprehension checks and clarification requests (Long, 1996). Many studies that have been conducted under laboratory conditions in which L2 learners interact with each other have found a great deal of *negotiation of meaning* to occur as well as evidence for its value in SLA (Mackey, 1999; Mackey & Goo, 2007). Some research carried out in classroom settings, however, has revealed that when students interact with each other they pretend that they understand each other rather than *negotiate for meaning* (Foster, 1998). This does not mean that L2 learner-learner interaction does not play an important role in classroom L2 learning, only that it may require more preparation, guidance, and supervision than we might expect on the basis of laboratory studies.

## Why this gap? Researchers' perspectives

Most SLA researchers – even those who do instructed SLA research and L2 classroom research are better at communicating with researchers than with teachers, do not have a good understanding of teachers' questions and concerns, and have not taught in

language classrooms for a long time. Also, most SLA researchers work at universities and in this context they are evaluated more positively when they publish in research journals because articles about pedagogy are given less weight than those focused on research. As a result, SLA researchers tend not to publish in professional journals or teachers' newsletters. This may account for the significant drop in the number of articles about L2 pedagogy in the flagship journal, *Applied Linguistics*, over the past 3 decades (Hellerman, 2015).<sup>3</sup> Fortunately, in recent years, universities and research funding agencies have placed more weight on the dissemination of research findings, the importance of shared knowledge, and the impact of research knowledge on society, i.e., education and second/foreign language education. Over time this should help to narrow the gap.

Another reason for the gap between research and pedagogy is that researchers are more interested in the general than the specific and there is a tendency to assume that knowledge can be transferred from the research context to a particular classroom context. This needs to be demonstrated rather than assumed. This issue is addressed in the section below which examines some of the ways in which the gap between SLA research and language pedagogy can be narrowed. Strategies are discussed first from the researcher's perspective followed by the teacher's stance. It is also important to emphasize that there are initiatives that both teachers and researchers can take to narrow the gap one of which is to value, build on and share each other's knowledge. This means breaking down the top-down nature of the researcher/teacher relationship in which the former is considered the expert and the latter the recipient of knowledge (Freeman, 1992; Ortega, 2012). Both share the goal of making classroom teaching and learning as successful as possible and both have a great deal to learn from each other.

Researchers and teachers bring different types of knowledge and experience to the research process. Starting with their own years as students--observing teachers in what has been called

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<sup>3</sup> This drop may also be related to the fact that there are more journals available today that publish articles about research on L2 pedagogy than there were in the early 1980s.

“the apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975), followed by their initial training, and continuing through their experience in the classroom, their interactions with other teachers, and the professional development activities that they engage in, teachers build up the knowledge they need to plan and carry out their daily tasks. They need to have grounding in pedagogical principles and practices including classroom management procedures and curriculum content, what the educational psychologist, Lee Shulman (1986) referred to as pedagogical and content knowledge. This includes knowledge about how languages are learned and the potential relevance of SLA research for practice. In the case of L2 teachers working in content-based approaches (e.g., immersion, CLIL), the curriculum content also includes the subject matter such as mathematics or geography. In addition, grade-school teachers need to know about child and adolescent psychology in order to understand their students—their strengths and weaknesses, and how best to motivate and encourage them to keep learning. Importantly, through their experience in the classroom, teachers acquire the wisdom of practice (Bransford et al., 2000). Researchers acquire and develop many kinds of knowledge as well. Many classroom-based researchers started their own careers as teachers and then began graduate study to further their knowledge and skills in areas including language acquisition theories, learning theories, pedagogical theory and practice, research design and statistics, curriculum development and research findings from other studies. Both types of knowledge and experience play crucial roles in developing a better understanding of L2 teaching and learning. Acknowledging and valuing each is central to bridging the gap between researchers and teachers. Below we examine how teachers and researchers can work toward this independently.

## **What can researchers do to bridge the gap?**

### *Write for teachers*

When one surveys the books available about L2 learning and teaching they tend to fall into two broad categories: 1) “how to” methodology texts designed for teachers with no (or very

few) explicit links to research and 2) academic texts designed for researchers and post-graduate students with thorough reviews of theory and research and few links to practice. Thus, there is a need for books that present research findings and make relevant links to L2 pedagogy. One way in which researchers can accomplish this is to write about research for teachers in accessible language, in management lengths and in various forms – including articles in teachers' journals and newsletters. For many researchers this is a challenging task because while they find it easy to communicate with their peers (i.e., fellow researchers) it is not easy to do so for a teacher audience. I was recently reminded of this when I became involved as a co-editor of a book series, *The Oxford Key Concepts for the Language Classroom*, designed to present teachers with information about research in L2 classrooms in accessible and meaningful ways and to make direct connections with practice (Lightbown & Spada, 2014–2019). The books are slim volumes each focused on a specific topic (e.g., literacy, assessment, reading, grammar, vocabulary) and targeted to L2 teachers in primary and secondary schools. In order to write these books, there was a need for authors who knew the relevant research in the topic areas and could communicate about the relevance of this research to practice in non-technical and meaningful ways. This was not easy. In the end we were fortunate to have found an excellent group of writers who have completed the nine volumes of the series. All of the authors have a deep knowledge of classrooms in a variety of learning environments and they also know the research. All of them are also teacher educators who have extensive experience and a deep commitment to working with teachers to make a positive impact on teaching and learning.

Writing in more accessible formats can also include a shift from expository to narrative discourse for example, writing case studies (i.e., 'telling stories') of L2 learners and teachers (Freeman & Johnson, 1998), and presenting classroom vignettes and school profiles (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2019). Other writing initiatives that help to bridge the gap between SLA research and L2 pedagogy include the innovative OASIS (Open Accessible Summaries in Language Studies) website (Marsden & Kaspruwicz, 2017).



This is a database of non-technical, one-page summaries of previously published research studies available for free on the web in a searchable format (e.g., topic, focus, age, language) available for free on the internet (<https://oasis-database.org>).

### *Exercise caution generalizing*

Researchers need to exercise greater caution in making generalizations about research findings because what one observes in one context does not necessarily reflect what is going on in other L2 classrooms. Indeed, research findings do not and cannot apply to all educational contexts, teachers, tasks, linguistic features, languages and learners. One example of this is the vast body of research on corrective feedback particularly recasts which are a type of indirect corrective feedback in which a learner's error is corrected while maintaining a focus on meaning and communication. In their research in French immersion classes, Lyster and Ranta (1997) observed that recasts were the preferred method of providing feedback and that students often failed to perceive them as corrective in nature. In recent reviews of a large number of studies it has been reported that the frequency, salience and effectiveness of recasts vary greatly across different teaching and learning contexts. These differences are related to age of the learners, levels of proficiency, the overall orientation of the instructional approach, teachers' language proficiency and other factors (Lyster et al., 2013). Another example of how difficult it is to generalize research findings is reported in a recent descriptive/observational study by Collins and White (2019). Their study investigating language-related episodes (LREs) between learners engaged in pair and small group interaction in intact classes showed that "even though there were many shared features among the three classes (e.g., age and proficiency of students, length and type of program, L1, L2, student familiarity with each other) there were differences in teaching approaches and classroom culture that were associated with differences in the frequency and characteristics of LREs. Thus, while the findings of their research were clearly applicable to the studied classrooms, the question remains to which other classrooms? This is further evidence that ultimately it is up to

individual teachers to identify the relative importance of research findings for their own contexts.

Over the years questions have been raised about the concept of generalizability as a feasible, realistic, or appropriate goal for classroom research on L2 learning and teaching (Larsen-Freeman, 1996; Lightbown, 1985, 2000) and other terms have been proposed to replace it. Stenhouse (1975) suggests “provisional specifications” arguing that any recommendation based on research needs to be provisional and must be tested and verified and adapted by each teacher in his/her classroom. Clarke (1994) recommends the concept of “particularizability” which refers to the need for researchers to provide as much information as possible about the research that can be made usable for particular teachers (e.g., details of the conditions of the classrooms studied, characteristics of learners, materials and activities, description of teachers, description of institutional factors). The question that is typically asked with respect to generalizability is: Can inferences be made about the findings and their applicability to the larger population? The question that is typically asked with respect to particularizability is: Can the information from the research be made usable for particular teachers? Clarke also argues that teachers can better evaluate research findings in light of their own situations and determine what is relevant and meaningful in their own contexts.

Of course, it is not just up to researchers to try to bridge the gap, it is also up to teachers. Below we examine some of the ways in which teachers can do this.

## **What can teachers do to bridge the gap?**

### *Invest in their professional development*

Teachers can invest in their professional development by attending conferences, by joining discussion and support groups with other teachers and by taking courses. In the SLA courses that I have taught to teachers over the years students sometimes come into the course with the impression that it is going to be theoretical, too heavy on research and probably not much good to them. However, students often say that it was one of the most practical courses they took in their teacher education program. What does

this mean? How was their teaching helped by what they learned in the course which was not a methodology/pedagogy course? The explanation seems to be that the SLA course provided them with a better understanding of the process of learning and the different factors that contribute to more or less successful L2 learning. This gives them greater confidence in their ability to evaluate their classroom experience, to look for ways to change things that do not seem to be working and to respond to their learners' needs in concrete and practical ways.

Professional development workshops, teachers' conferences and courses are only a first step. Once teachers have heard about new ideas, they need to have someone to discuss these ideas with, in the context of their own classrooms. This kind of professional development is being done in some immersion contexts where researchers work with teachers in the implementation of research-based pedagogy (Lyster et al., 2018). This is discussed in more detail in the section below entitled *Mediators in the researcher-teacher gap*.

### *Participate and collaborate in research studies*

Another effort teachers can make to bridge the gap is to participate in research studies either as participants or collaborators. If they are involved as study participants, this is one way of making sure that researchers are better informed about the realities of L2 teaching and learning in classrooms. One of the ways this is best accomplished is for teachers to open their doors to researchers to spend time observing in L2 classrooms before they engage in intervention studies (Spada, 2005; Spada et al., 1996). As we know, teachers do not always trust researchers who say that they just want to "observe" classes. Even when they are assured that the purpose of the observation is to ensure that the researchers understand something about a typical day in a particular classroom, teachers may find it difficult to carry on with "business as usual" when there is an observer in the classroom. One way to mitigate the tendency for teachers to alter their classroom behavior in order to present the most positive picture of the typical day is to spend enough hours in the classroom over a period of time

so that both teachers and students become comfortable. In many cases, this can be accomplished when researchers become assistant teachers or participant observers and can circulate among students and interact with them as they engage in individual or small group work. Establishing relationships like these helps to build trust between teachers and researchers and acknowledges that both bring different types of knowledge and expertise to the L2 teaching and learning process.

Collaborating with researchers to investigate questions about teaching and learning is also considered to be an effective way to bridge the research/practice gap but the challenge is obtaining time for teachers to do so. How can this be done? One model has been the establishment of research schools that are often affiliated with universities where the expectation is that research is frequently underway and teachers and researchers work together on research and teaching projects. Another model is 'field sites' in school districts. In these contexts, researchers become more familiar with the questions and concerns of teachers and teachers become more familiar with how to investigate these questions. This leads to research that is "practice-relevant by design rather than as a result of retro-fitting" (Uccelli & Snow, 2008, p. 628). Despite these advantages, it is not easy to establish research schools at universities or field sites in school districts because they require considerable resources and long-term commitments.

Another way in which teachers and researchers establish collaborative relationships occurs more organically and often emerges based on relationships established in other contexts. For example, when teachers decide to 'go back to school' and take advanced degrees they have opportunities to collaborate on research projects with their professors as well as to conduct their own research under the direction of a thesis supervisor. This collaborative work can also lead to joint publications. Some examples of research and writing collaborations within L2 classroom research that have focused on drawing learners' attention to language in meaning and content-based instruction include Kowal & Swain (1994), Doughty & Varela (1998) and Pica et al. (1998).

An example of a research project that grew out of a teacher professional development course that took place in multilin-

gual classrooms in Canada began with a few elementary school teachers who expressed an interest in examining questions about their own practice after the course ended (Denos et al., 2009). The project included a diverse group of participants – teachers, research assistants/graduate students, teachers-in-training, and a videographer. The research questions came from the teachers and they were guided by the professor/researcher who had taught the course and worked to support, facilitate, and inform the work. Some of the factors thought to contribute to the group's success were: 1) the inclusion of diverse viewpoints as represented by the differently placed participants (with the professor and graduate students offering research, the teachers offering stories of experience in working with children); 2) the necessity of each participant to produce 'something' (usually a report of their research for publication in a teacher journal but also videos and workshop presentations to colleagues); 3) an ethos in the group that they were not looking for *answers* or 'best practices' but rather working together to identify questions and ways of gathering data to address these questions, and then documenting experimentation with various responses (Toohey, personal communication).

Another way that teachers and researchers collaborate emerges from long-term relationships that are built on trust and situated in local contexts (Spada & Lightbown, 2019). This characterizes how I engaged in L2 classroom research with my colleague Patsy Lightbown in Quebec schools over many years. Influenced by the research cycle of observation, correlation and experimentation (Rosenshine & Furst, 1973) and process-product research (Long, 1980/1983) we worked closely with teachers to investigate a wide range of questions of mutual interest about L2 teaching and learning (Lightbown & Spada, 1994; Spada & Lightbown, 1989, 2019). The nature of our sustained research in local communities gave us the opportunity to regularly return to the schools and classrooms we had visited before. This enabled us to see first-hand how the instructional practices were evolving over time in relation to the research we had carried out in the classrooms and schools.

There are many other examples of classroom researchers and teacher educators working together in different geographic

**Table 1.** Ways for researchers and teachers to bridge the gap

SLA Researchers	L2 Teachers
Write for teachers in accessible and summative ways; publish in their journals	Invest in professional development (e.g. conferences, courses, reading groups)
Collaborate with teachers on research projects	Collaborate with researchers on research projects
Gain a better understanding of teachers' questions & concerns	Decide what research questions and findings are relevant in their own context
Exercise caution in the general; emphasize local	Carry out their own research by themselves for themselves

contexts and research paradigms making connections between research and L2 teaching. Those who have focused on primary and secondary students and their teachers include Mary Schleppegrell and colleagues working with English language learners and teachers in the US (de Oliveira & Schleppegrell, 2015) Roy Lyster and his colleagues working with French immersion learners and teachers in Canada (Lyster, 2018), and Ros Mitchell and Florence Myles with foreign language teachers in the UK (Mitchell, 2014).

Action research is often described as one of the best ways for teachers to engage in meaningful relevant research because it is contextual, small-scale and localized, aims to bring about change and improvement in practice and provides opportunities for collaborative investigation by teams of colleagues including practitioners and researchers (Burns, 1999). As with other types of collaborative research one of the challenges facing action research is getting time for teachers to do it. Institutional support is essential for teachers to be able to take time away from their full-time jobs to systematically investigate questions about their pedagogical practice.

Table 1 presents a summary of what we have discussed so far with respect to the different ways in which teachers and researchers can work independently and together to bridge the gap

between research and pedagogy. Note that the last item in the L2 teachers' column "Carry out their own research by themselves for themselves" is discussed below in the section *Alternative solutions to the researcher/teacher gap*.

## Mediators in the researcher-teacher gap

In discussing the researcher/teacher gap Ellis (2010) claims that both SLA researchers and L2 teachers are more likely to come into contact with classroom researchers and teacher educators than they are with each other. Therefore, he argues that it is the classroom researchers and teacher educators who function as mediators between SLA researchers and teachers. As a classroom researcher and teacher educator I agree that both play important mediator roles. Next, we examine some research that has investigated the impact that knowledge obtained in teacher education courses has on L2 teacher practice.

Several studies have explored whether teachers' beliefs about L2 learning and teaching change after participation in SLA courses. Some of this work has included a questionnaire that appears in the introduction to *How Languages are Learned* (Lightbown & Spada, 2021). In this questionnaire teachers and teachers-in-training are asked to reflect on their views about how languages are learned and what they think this means about how languages should be taught. They are presented with a list of statements that summarize popular opinions about language learning and teaching and asked to indicate whether they strongly agree (SA), agree (A), strongly disagree (SD) or disagree (D) with them. Table 2 includes a selection of statements from the questionnaire.

Studies that have used versions of this questionnaire suggest changes in teachers' beliefs about how languages are learned after participation in SLA courses (Badger et al., 2001; Kerekes, 2001). Other studies using different questionnaires and methodologies also suggest a beneficial role in terms of changes in teachers' beliefs as a result of information about how languages are learned and taught (e.g., Borg, 2009, 2010; Freeman, 2002; Johnson, 1992).

**Table 2.** Selection of opinions about L2 teaching and learning  
(adapted from Lightbown & Spada, 2021)

1. Languages are learned mainly through imitation.	SA	A	D	SD
2. Some people have a special talent for learning languages.				
3. The most important predictor of success in second language acquisition is motivation.				
4. The best way to learn new vocabulary is through reading.				
5. Teachers should teach simple language structures before complex ones.				
6. Learners' errors should be corrected as soon as they are made in order to prevent the formation of bad habits.				
7. Students learn what they are taught.				
8. Classrooms are good places to learn about language but not for learning how to use language.				

*Note:* SA (Strongly agree); A (Agree); D (Disagree) SD (Strongly disagree)

In a study by Erlam (2008), ten general principles of effective L2 instruction were developed based on a survey of SLA research. Included among them are:

- Instruction needs to ensure that learners focus predominantly on meaning
- Instruction needs to ensure that learners also focus on form
- Successful instructed language learning requires extensive L2 input
- Successful instructed language learning also requires opportunities for output
- The opportunity to interact in the L2 is central to developing L2 proficiency

Erlam and her colleagues looked for evidence of the 10 principles in the teaching practices in Japanese and French language classrooms in secondary schools in New Zealand. This was



accomplished by interviewing the teachers about the principles and asking them how they realized them in their own teaching. The results revealed that discussions about these principles improved teachers' knowledge of L2 pedagogy and gave them a shared language to talk about L2 teaching and learning. Some teachers were motivated to carry out action research based on the principles in their own classrooms. While the overall results were positive, what this study did not do was to investigate whether this new knowledge and awareness led to any changes in their teaching practices. A study by McDonough (2006) set out to do this in a graduate course by engaging graduate students who were also language teaching assistants (TA's) in action research. The TA's were asked to identify topics to investigate motivated by their own practice. Some of the topics focused on approaches to grammar instruction, techniques for encouraging class participation and syllabus design. The students were guided in the design of the research by the instructor and their classmates. The data that were collected included: TA's professional journals, TA's reflective essays, TA's action research reports and instructors' field notes. The results indicated that the TA's broadened their perspectives about research, valued the opportunity to do research rather than just reading research, gained a greater understanding of their L2 classrooms, and importantly, used that understanding to implement new practices to improve their teaching.

In a recent study of the effects of professional development courses on teachers' practice, Tedick & Zilmer (2018) investigated the experiences of 75 immersion teachers engaged in online courses that addressed how to focus on language instruction in content-based language teaching. They explored how the different types and specific features of the activities and assignments that students engaged in during the course affected their practice. The experiences that had the highest impact were ones that involved opportunities to give and receive feedback, to put into practice what they learned, as well as those that resulted in observable changes in student learning and included collaboration and opportunities for reflection. In discussing the limitations of the study, the researchers point to the fact that the data consisted of teachers' reports and perceptions in terms of what made a

difference in their practice rather than direct observations and documentation of their actual classroom practice.

## **Alternative solutions to the researcher-teacher gap**

Up to this point we have discussed different ways in which the gap can be bridged between SLA research and L2 pedagogy. Of course this gap cannot be bridged unless both teachers and researchers are motivated to do so and certainly not until teachers' 'practical' knowledge is considered to be equally important as researchers' 'technical' knowledge; teachers are viewed as participants not consumers; and communication is two-way not one-way (i.e., reciprocal). Some scholars argue that this is unlikely to happen because the research- practice model, which has traditionally positioned researchers at the centre and teachers in the periphery, is not likely to change (Clarke, 1994; Freeman, 1996). Indeed, researchers working in critical pedagogy claim that advocating teacher-researcher collaboration is misguided because it simply prolongs the inequality that exists between them (Stewart, 2006). It is further argued that the gap will continue to exist because researchers and teachers inhabit different social worlds and communicate through different discourses (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Pennycook, 1999).

In response to these concerns another path has been suggested – research done by teachers for teachers. This option moves researchers out of the equation entirely and is consistent with Allwright's (2005) exploratory practice model in which teachers develop their own ways of asking questions and reporting results using classroom activities as research tools. In this process, teachers make their own discoveries about how their own learners learn language creating and adding to their own knowledge base. The argument that the best source of knowledge about teaching comes from teachers is compatible with the Theory of Practice (Bourdieu, 1977; Kramsch, 2015) which breaks down the artificial divide between theory and practice and claims that theories about teaching and learning do not come from the outside e.g., from linguistic or cognitive theories. Instead theory emerges from practice and the building up of knowledge that comes from teachers' reflective practice which is directly relevant

to teachers' social contexts. Such an approach represents a significant paradigm shift and is intellectually incompatible with the traditional theory-research-practice model. Does this mean that they are mutually exclusive? I do not think so. In my view, both efforts are needed, that is, efforts to bring researchers and teachers together to work in mutually respectful and reciprocal ways as well as efforts to position and support teachers to carry out their own research and develop their own theories of practice. I believe that a combination of these actions will contribute positively to narrowing the gap between SLA research and L2 pedagogy.

## Conclusion

In this paper I have discussed some of the reasons for the gap between SLA research and L2 pedagogy and suggested ways in which teachers and researchers can work separately and together to help narrow this gap. I have suggested that researchers write for teachers in accessible and summative ways, gain a better understanding of teachers' questions and concerns, and exercise caution in generalizing research findings. For teachers, I have suggested that they invest in professional development, decide what research questions and findings are relevant in their own contexts and collaborate with researchers as well as carry out research themselves. In order to make classroom teaching and learning as successful as possible there is no doubt that researchers can benefit from teachers' knowledge and experience of what is important for L2 teaching and learning and teachers can benefit from an understanding of how SLA research can contribute to L2 classroom practice.

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