Chapter 1

Researching Applied Linguistics in Language Teacher Education

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INTRODUCTION

That language teachers need to know about applied linguistic fields such as pedagogical grammar, discourse analysis, second language learning, etc. would seem to be self-evident (Flynn, 1994; Tyler & Lardiere, 1996). However, the knowledge that teachers use in their practice, however, is more complicated that just knowing facts, using facts, and general conceptions of language and language learning. In order to produce quality research on language teachers’ learning in applied linguistics courses and their use of their KAL in teaching, we need to move away from folk psychology conceptions of the mind (Strauss, 2001) to a more sophisticated and complex view of knowledge, knowledge acquisition, and knowledge use. If a broader conception of what kinds of knowledge language teachers need and use it to be investigated, a great variety of research methodology will be necessary. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to introduce to a wide range of data collection tools and indicate resources which can be used for those interested in investigating the theories behind their practices as teachers of applied linguistics. Lists of a number of studies using each research tool will be provided for readers who wish to familiarize themselves with ways that certain research methods have been used to investigate specific questions in order to deepen their knowledge of these research tools and, perhaps, to inspire their own research.

However, it will not be possible in the space available here for a complete presentation of various research perspectives or a full discussion of the task of researching teacher knowledge or each data collection tool. This has been done elsewhere and need not be repeated here. For summaries of research methodology in (a) applied linguistics see Freeman (1996; 1998), Hornberger & Corson (1999), Nunan (1992), and McDonough & McDonough (1998); (b) educational research see Bogdan & Biklen (1998), Byra & Karp (2000), Maxwell (1996), and Miles & Huberman (1994),

and Royer, Cisero & Carlo (1993); and (c) cognitive psychology see Cooke (1999), Patel & Arocha (1995) and Olsen & Biolsi (1991).

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

There are four main categories of data collection presented in this section: observation, documentation, reports and introspection, and tasks. Researchers seriously considering triangulating their research, i.e. using multiple sources of data to increase research credibility (Davis, 1995; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), might want to consider choosing data collection instruments from a variety of these four categories. Foss and Kleinsasser (2001) have shown that different types of data, such as questionnaire data or observation data, reveal different aspects of teachers' knowledge and so the use of a variety of instruments is necessary to get a fuller picture of teachers' knowledge. (See Johnson, 1992, 1994, 1996, Westerman, 1991, or Woods, 1996, for excellent examples of triangulation in studies of teacher learning and teacher knowledge.) Triangulation is seen as increasingly important in the study of teacher cognition, as many studies have found that reliance on single or similar sets of data can result in misleading research results (e.g. Foss & Kleinsasser, 2001; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981).

OBSERVATION

One of the most common ways of collecting data about teachers' knowledge and knowledge use is by observing them teaching (Borg, 1998; 1999; Lamb, 1995; Grossman, 1990; 1991; Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997, Carpenter et al, 1989). While this usually entails observation of school teaching only, it may also include observing all aspects of a particular practice such as informal conversation with colleagues on goals for a course, discussions with parents or administrators, etc. (Dunbar, 1995). An alternative to direct observation is to tape classes and then analyze the transcripts (Johnston & Goettsch, 1999; Villamil & Guerero, 1998). Observation is good for looking at whether teachers really use the knowledge from applied linguistics courses in their teaching practice, and also produces data for examining their routines and schemata. However, observation can be very time consuming so most researchers limit the number of visits they make and the number of teachers the observe, which then raises questions about the generalizability of the findings. One potential problem with observing classes of your students or former students is that they may feel compelled to do things they think you want to see, rather than teach the way they would if you were not there (Duffy & Roehler, 1986). Therefore, it is important to gain the teachers' trust so that they feel free to teach in any way they wish. You also may be able to get around this by having them observed by a co-researcher who has not been their teacher. For suggestions of how to record data while observing see Freeman (1998), Boglan & Bicklen (1992), and Day (1990).