

Research Issues and Language Program Direction

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INTRODUCTION

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This volume, *Research Issues in Language Program Direction*, is the ninth in the AAUSC series of annual volumes dealing with issues in language program direction. The volume is divided into two parts. The first, *Research and Language Program Directors: The Relationship*, deals with how research fits into the lives of language program directors (LPDs). The second part, *Research and Language Program Directors: Possibilities*, contains examples of the variety of research that LPDs have found appropriate and useful.

Overview of Articles

The four articles in the first section address important issues in the lives and careers of LPDs. VanPatten (*Research Domains and Language Program Direction*) poses vital questions about LPDs' roles as scholars and researchers. What kinds of research are possible? How is a research agenda set and developed? What is the relationship between graduate studies and the research component of an LPD's professional career? And finally, should the field of applied linguistics/second language acquisition continue to exist within the same academic structure (department) as literary studies? The answers he provides have implications not only for individual LPDs but also for the wider vistas of graduate education and governance structures.

Celeste Kinginger (*Language Program Direction and the Modernist Agenda*) provides a provocative description of the interaction between research specialization, language pedagogy, and language program direction, suggesting that "modernist research" is inherently limiting to the entire enterprise. Kinginger suggests that LPDs should seek to establish "coherent approaches to practice" and to resist the restrictions imposed by a research agenda that is distanced from practical work. In a similar vein, Rafael Salaberry (*The Research-Pedagogy Interface in L2 Acquisition: Implications for*

Language Program Directors) discusses the role of research—taken in a large sense—in the development of a language program and in the professionalization of program staff. He terms this the “research-pedagogy interface” and provides discussion of the interface between research findings and L2 pedagogy. The last paper in this section is by Nadine Di Vito (*Applications of Sociolinguistic and Sociolcultural Research to the French Language Classroom*). Di Vito’s contribution represents a case study of how research and language program direction can work in tandem. Her research in the area of French corpora linguistics and French/US intercultural pragmatics is an example of the beneficial synergy brought to language program direction by a well-thought-out research agenda.

The second section of this volume contains five articles, each of which exemplifies research LPDs are likely to find relevant to their own situations. The first, *Beliefs and Practices of Teaching Assistants toward Target Language Use in Elementary French Classes*, by Michael Morris, discusses classroom language choice as reflected upon by teaching assistants. This is a qualitative study illustrating the use of video, interview, and questionnaire data to investigate classroom behavior. Morris’ conclusions—that language choice is a function of several interdependent forces—provides useful information for LPDs as they set up curricula and deal with novice teachers. The second paper in this section, *Gesture in Japanese Language Instruction: The Case of Error Correction*, by Naoko Muramoto, is an exploratory study of a seldom investigated area, that of gestures, in the second language classroom. Her data indicate that the use of gestures for error correction tends to follow the familiar verbal pattern found in classrooms of initiation-response-evaluation. The third paper, *Investigating the Properties of Assessment Instruments and the Setting of Proficiency Standards for Admission into University Second Language Courses*, by Micheline Chalhoub-Deville, represents a quantitative study in the area of assessment. Chalhoub-Deville documents the psychometric properties of the proficiency-based assessment instruments used as part of the Minnesota Articulation Project, with particular emphasis on the process of standard setting.

The fourth contribution, *Positional Pedagogies and Understanding the Other: Epistemological Research, Subjective Theories, Narratives, and the Language Program Director in a “Web of Relationships,”* authored by Mary E. Wildner-Bassett and Birgit Meerholz-Haerle, discusses two qualitative studies concerning how theories are co-constructed, one within the context

of language section meetings, and one as part of a graduate seminar focusing on the “Other.” These two qualitative studies illustrate an approach to research that echoes that taken by Kinginger. The final article, *The Professionalization of Language Teachers: A Case Study of the Professional Development Needs of Lecturers at the University of California, Berkeley*, by Nelleke Van Deusen-Scholl, Linda von Hoene, and Karen Møller-Irving, uses survey/questionnaire data to describe the situation within a program where the majority of language instructors are *not* expected to construct active research agendas. The authors document the need for providing research resources for professional language teachers and set out a framework for such professional development.

Conclusion

The position of LPD is a complex one. Teaching, for LPDs, frequently extends beyond the immediate classroom context to the mentoring of both graduate students (novice teachers) and professional staff. In addition, LPDs may or may not be expected to establish an active and coherent research agenda as part of their conditions of employment. Added to the mix is the fact that, as of present, there is no established route by which one becomes an LPD. That is, there is no established graduate program curriculum that prepares future LPDs. Given the above, it should come as small surprise that many LPDs find situating themselves within a comfortable research space—whether as producers or consumers or adapters—to be a distinctly uncomfortable process and one that is fraught with difficulties. As attested to by the contents of the current volume, however, it is an enterprise that is both possible and profitable.

A final word. As VanPatten points out, we have indeed been doing something right. The fact that there are increasing numbers of LPDs with professional training in the field of applied linguistics and second language acquisition attests to that. The fact that increasing numbers of departments appear to feel the need for a professional LPD, frequently if not always, as a tenured or tenure-track appointment attests to that also. Finally, the fact that we, as a group, are able to reflect upon the role of research within our professional lives is further proof of our having done something right. The critical question now, of course, is not only how to continue “doing something right,” but, even more importantly, how to “do things better” for those who will follow us.