

Removing the barriers to research engagement – teacher motivation for research-based teaching development in language centres

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Abstract: This article draws on several workshops we have held on teacher research engagement. These recent workshops have indicated that many language centre teachers in Finland identify the same barriers that prevent them from doing research. In the same vein, these teachers tend to agree on the factors that drive them to do research. Based on our workshop at the *Language Centres in Higher Education: Sharing Innovations, Research, Methodology and Best Practices* conference, European language centre teachers share similar thoughts about research engagement: they like the idea of doing research and they often do some research, but sometimes find the barriers in their professional lives too great. Using research findings as well as data collected in the Brno workshop, we aim to discuss 1) the motives of teachers to carry out or follow research in fields related to teaching and learning and 2) ways and methods that encourage or facilitate teacher research. To help us reach these aims, we present the story of Johanna, to exemplify a teacher's experiences in becoming research engaged while taking part in in-house pedagogical training that fostered research orientation.

Key words: teacher research, research engagement, professional development, university pedagogy

Abstrakt: Tento příspěvek čerpá z několika workshopů zabývajících se zapojení učitelů do výzkumu. Ukázalo se, že mnoho učitelů jazykových center ve Finsku uvádí shodné překážky, které jim brání provádět výzkum. Ve stejném duchu se tito učitelé převážně shodují na faktorech, které je ve výzkumu podporují. Jak vyplývá z našeho workshopu na konferenci *Language Centres in Higher Education: Sharing Innovations, Research, Methodology and Best Practices* (Jazyková centra ve vyšším vzdělávání: sdílení inovací, výzkum, metodologie a nejlepší praxe), učitelé evropských jazykových center vyjadřují podobné názory na zapojení do výzkumu: myšlenka provádění výzkumu se jim líbí a často nějaký výzkum dělají, ale někdy shledávají překážky spojené s výzkumem za příliš velké. S použitím poznatků a údajů shromážděných ve workshopu v Brně zamýšlíme diskutovat o 1) motivech učitelů provádět či sledovat výzkum v oborech vztahujících se k výuce a studiu a 2) způsobech a metodách, které podporují či usnadňují učitelův výzkum. Jako pomůcku pro dosažení těchto cílů uvádíme příběh Johanny, který ilustruje zkušenosti učitele se zapojením se do výzkumu při současném pedagogickém vzdělávání na pracovišti, které napomohlo orientaci výzkumu.

1 Introduction

Practitioner research as a way of helping practitioners develop and grow professionally has become common. Language teacher research, the form of practitioner research close to us, plays a significant role in our professional lives, despite the different job descriptions each one of us has.

Based on our own observations in the Finnish context, we believe that research that is relevant to teachers' teaching and their students' learning encourages teachers in many ways. Our own institution, the Language Centre at the University of Helsinki, has employed many research-active teachers and been active since its establishment in 1977, but it is only in the past few years that the Language Centre has taken planned and systematic steps towards involving a large number of teachers in teacher research (see Lehtonen et al., 2015). This conscious development has been elementary in many small-scale projects and has so far given rise to three Language Centre publications (Pitkänen et al. 2011, Matilainen et al. 2013, Lehtonen & Vaattovaara et al. forthcoming). It has also enabled the practice of including some research or research based development into a teacher's annual work contract, a practice that was not systematically and transparently encouraged in the past. It has allowed for small teaching reductions (rather symbolic in nature), which together with other support structures facilitate research but are not financially unfeasible. We deal with our local research support structures in some more detail below, in chapter 3 (see also Lehtonen et al. 2015 for a more detailed analysis).

The research-friendly work culture fostered in our Language Centre has convinced us that teacher research has the potential to empower. Because of this belief, we have sought to increase awareness of the topic both within and beyond our own Language Centre. The focus of this article is on teacher motivation for research engagement, based on survey data collected among Finnish university Language Centre staff across Finland, as well as on several workshops that the authors have been involved with over the past few years¹.

It seems that the forces driving teachers to conduct research and those preventing them from doing so have some universal characteristics. Workshops related to the topic of language teacher research have indicated that many language centre teachers in Finland identify the same barriers that prevent them from carrying out research. In the same vein, these teachers tend to agree on the factors that drive them to do research. Based on our workshop at the *Language Centres in Higher Education: Sharing Innovations, Research, Methodology and Best Practices* conference in Brno², European language centre teachers share similar thoughts about research engagement: they like the idea of carrying out research and they often do some, but sometimes find the barriers in their professional lives too great (see also Borg 2013: 115–123). However, it is clear that teachers, irrespective of where they come from, tend to feel strongly about the topic and would like to find ways to lower the barriers to research engagement. Encouraging teacher research is therefore important.

¹ Vaattovaara, one of the authors, organised or co-organised three local workshops in different higher education language centres and one national workshop in Finland from 2012 to 2013.

² Workshop given by Lehtonen & Vaattovaara, *Research-based teaching development in language centres – barriers and drivers*.

This article has two aims. Using research findings as well as data collected in workshops, we aim to discuss 1) the motives of teachers to carry out or follow research in fields related to teaching and learning and 2) ways and methods that encourage or facilitate teacher research. To achieve this second aim, we briefly deal with the organisational support structures present in our own institution, and review some related literature and extract information on organisational structures from data collected in workshops. The two aims are intertwined: with no knowledge of the motives, it is difficult to encourage and facilitate teachers, while on the other hand, without facilitation it may be difficult for a teacher to get started with research. Hence, we will tap into both of these aspects, motivation and facilitation, in order to gain insights into removing the barriers and fostering the drivers of research engagement in Language Centre contexts.

2 Motives for research engagement

To research or not to research – is that the question?

Based on our experiences and workshop discussions, university language centre teachers tend to view research in a positive light (although there are some discrepancies). This is not surprising, because we work in universities that, by default, promote, follow and carry out research. However, language centre teachers as practitioners are, in our view, slightly different from their counterparts in other university departments. They often have a heavier teaching load than their departmental colleagues and a keen interest in teaching. Many of them have teaching qualifications, but not doctorates. Research – either following it or doing it (see Borg 2010) – is for many language centre teachers not the top priority. However, many language centre teachers share the types of motives to be research engaged that have been highlighted in research.

A recent online survey (ELTstat) aimed to find out what motivates English language teachers (ELT) in Britain to develop (undertake continuous professional development). The most common reasons given were to improve one's career prospects and develop as a teacher (personal development). Borg (2010: 408) refers to a larger study that concluded that teachers are engaged in research “for personal and professional reasons rather than due to external forces such as promotion or employer pressure”.

The data collected in spring 2014 among Finnish university language centre staff indicate the same views³. Although reasons for research engagement were not directly

³ The national survey concerning research and development orientation and interests was carried out via an electronic form during spring 2014 across the university language centres of Finland. Responding was voluntary, and the response rate relatively low, i.e. the responses are possibly positively biased towards research engagement. However, the respondents represented all language centres. The data are owned by the FINELC research support network and available for research purposes to all its members.

asked in this survey, the majority of the 129 respondents agreed fully or partly with the claim *I feel that research engagement is a natural part of my work* (see Figure 1; also Rontu & Tuomi, in preparation).

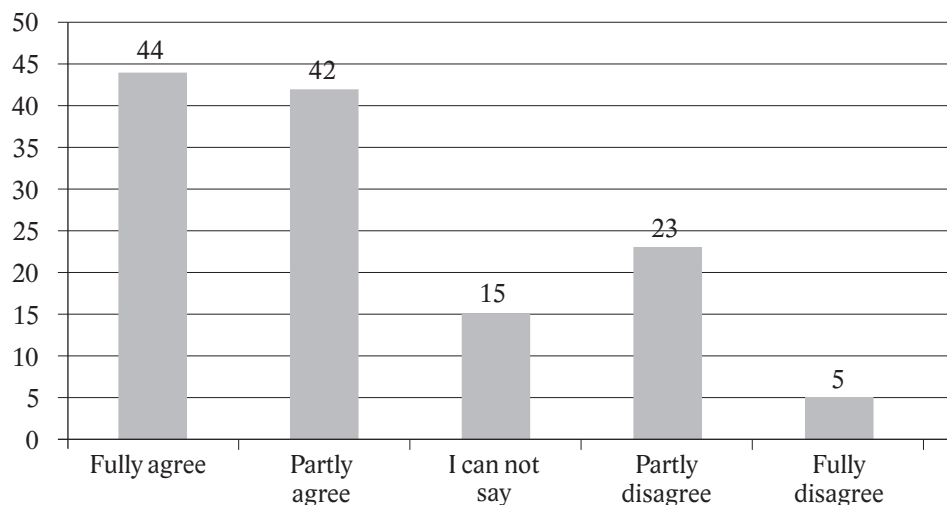


Fig. 1: FINELC survey responses to the claim *I feel that research engagement is a natural part of my work* ($N = 129$)

Open responses to the question *What else would you like to say about your relationship or engagement with research / research-based development of teaching?* shed some light on what is meant by research being a natural part of one's work. The responses often reflect a professional identity in which research-based teaching development is viewed as a crucial part of teacher identity rather than making a distinction between research and development. The following quotations exemplify the respondents' views:

It makes teaching more than an everyday chore. It gives you an aim and therefore a willingness to develop.

Tekee opetuksesta ihan erilaista kuin vain peruspullaa. Antaa tavoitteen ja sitä myötä halua kehittyä.

I think that by working with students in an academic setting, and particularly working with researchers (PhD and above), it is natural and essential to be part of the research community rather than on the outside looking in. (Original in English)

I think that research engagement is an attitude and way of life. Being involved in research and development projects is already valuable and instructional as such, even

though the projects would not reach an end. And research never ends, even though papers get published.

Tutkimuksellisuus on minusta asenne ja elämäntapa. Se että on mukana tutkimus- ja kehittämishankkeissa on jo sinänsä arvokasta ja opettavaista, vaikei mitään valmistakaan tulisi. Eikä tutkimuksesta valmista koskaan tulekaan, vaikka papereita julkaistaankin.

These quotations undoubtedly do not correspond to the views and experiences of all language teachers, but it is worth noting that, according to the FINELC survey, 92% of the respondents agreed fully or partly with the claim *The development of teaching should be research based*. Only six respondents disagreed with the claim (of whom five only partly), while 74 fully agreed (45 partly agreed). Recalling that the responses may be positively biased towards research orientation, this outcome reveals where the motivation stems from for research-based teaching development.

It is also important to note that many respondents expressed their loneliness or lack of support in research engagement. The following two quotations indicate that it is not often the motive or even time that the respondents do not have. They seem to lack collegial networking, support or the initial “push” to get started:

In my view, a teacher should have time for research-based teaching development. However, a teacher should not be left alone, collegial collaboration could be fruitful.

Mielestäni opettajalla tulisi olla aikaa opetuksensa tutkimukselliseen kehittämiseen. Opettaja ei kuitenkaan saisi jäädä yksin, kollegiaalinen yhteistyö voisi olla hedelmällistä.

I think I would be very interested in doing research, but I would need help at least at the start. I think that, in language centres, much more useful research would have been done if only some clear instructions had been developed: what could be done, how to start, where to get advice.

Luulen, että itse olen erittäin kiinnostunut tutkimustyöstä, mutta kaipaan apua ainakin alussa. Varmaan kielikeskuksissa olisi paljon enemmän hyödyllistä tutkimustyötä tehty, jos olisi kehitetty jotenkin selvät ohjeet: mitä voi tehdä, mistä voi aloittaa, mistä voi saada neuvoa.

Many respondents felt that they did not have enough time to do research themselves, but many followed research published in the field:

I find I have little time for research/research-based development of teaching. There is hardly enough time to keep up with the development of the field; read what other people have written. (Originally in English)

The distinction often used by Borg (see e.g. Borg 2010) between *engagement with research* and *engagement in research* is useful in that it may have potential in encouraging a larger number of teachers to believe that they are part of the world of research. For Borg (see Borg 2010, Borg 2013), engagement with research means exploring for pedagogical relevance, reading and using research as a source of enhanced understanding of teaching (not as a direct solution to problems), and integrating insights from reading with the teacher’s existing pedagogical practices and theories. In short, engagement with research is following and reacting to the developments in the field. In contrast, engagement in research means actively doing research. How “doing research” can be defined is difficult in the context of teacher research and, indeed, practitioners are often unsure whether their work on the development of teaching counts as research.

According to the FINELC survey targeted at Finnish language centre staff, 43% of the respondents were uncertain whether their work on teaching development counts as research. Out of the 129 respondents, 12 fully agreed and 44 partly agreed with the claim “I’m often uncertain whether my work on the development of teaching counts as research or not.” (See Figure 2, and also Rontu & Tuomi, 2015).

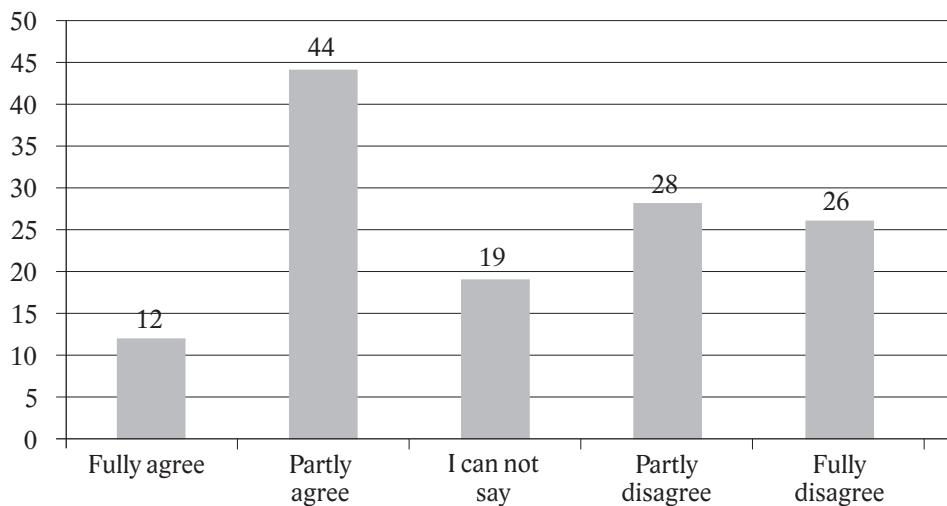


Fig. 2: FINELC survey responses to the claim *I’m often uncertain whether my work on the development of teaching counts as research or not* (N = 129)

This sense of uncertainty needs to be considered if the aim is to enable teachers to value their research-related work and to see this work as engagement in or with research. This sense can be overcome if we understand that teachers are research-engaged even if their research or development activities do not involve large sets of data or the use of statistical methods. Borg and Sanchez (2015: 1) suggest that

“a minimal definition of teacher research is systematic self-study by teachers (individually or collaboratively) which seeks to achieve real-world impact of some kind and is made public”. We revisit this below with some concrete examples.

International workshop

The workshop we held at the *Language Centres in Higher Education: Sharing Innovations, Research, Methodology and Best Practices* conference offered us a possibility of sharing aspects of research-based teaching development in an international context. The aim of the workshop was to discuss both drivers for and barriers to research engagement, in a similar way to the workshops that we had been involved with in Finland (see chapter 1). The definition of what counts as research was not discussed (due to time limitations) but given in the introductory part. The other aim of the workshop was to establish a Europe-wide research network for language centre teachers.

Approximately 40 conference guests from ten countries participated in the workshop in January 2015. After a short introduction to the workshop, the participants were asked in small groups to reflect on research engagement. They were first requested to consider *what is required from their workplaces* and second, *what is required from them as individuals* if the goal is to encourage research engagement⁴.

The group work revealed the following main trends. For the workplace to encourage research, it needs to allow for enough **time for research engagement** and enough **financial resources**. In addition, the workplace needs to recognise **different types of research**, not only research leading to academic qualifications, for example a PhD, but also **smaller projects**. According to the workshop discussions, the workplace also needs to **encourage personal growth** and **professional development**.

It became clear that although the participants came from different places and were heterogeneous in many ways, they largely shared the same set of challenges, or at least some of them (e.g. a lack of time and financial resources for research). Their workplaces and their support mechanisms varied to an extent, but many expressed frustration towards management policies – the fact that research engagement (in some places this meant other than PhD level research) of language teachers is not always encouraged by the faculties, department heads or other personnel in leadership roles, because language centres are considered as teaching organisations. One solution was suggested: establishing a “research-based teaching development” discourse instead of “research” discourse within a university, since it is evident that the tasks and duties of language centres differ from those of faculties and their research requirements. There is evidence from many contexts that language centres

⁴ The idea for structuring the workshop discussion in this way came from Borg 2010.

lack permission to carry out research, but hardly any institution forbids teaching development.

From the individual point of view, the groups brought up similar elements – the fact that an individual is sometimes prevented from doing research because of an **excessive workload, stress** and **time restrictions**, as well as a **lack of support** and **appreciation** by colleagues or department heads. One aspect was also a lack of **research skills** and the **habit of doing research**. On the other hand, an individual is driven to research because of **interest in networking** and **building contacts**, as well as **broadening one's expertise**. In addition, an individual often finds **personal satisfaction** and **self-development** as incentives for research engagement and is willing to be engaged in order **to renew and enliven teaching**.

The workshop in Brno reinforced our beliefs, created in other workshops and small get-togethers and widely covered in the literature, that teachers can easily identify barriers that they perceive to prevent them from being engaged in and with research. At the same time, they are able to identify driving forces that help them overcome these barriers.

Based on an extensive literature review, Borg (2010: 409) lists the following commonly expressed barriers to teacher research: non-collaborative school culture; limitations in teachers' awareness, beliefs, skills and knowledge; limited resources; demotivational factors such as research efforts are not acknowledged by colleagues or managers; economic matters; leadership attributes and political issues. It is not difficult to connect these factors to those raised in the workshop in Brno and discussed above.

Despite the obstacles teachers face in being engaged *with* and, especially, *in* research, they seem to find ways to overcome the obstacles, as evidenced by the wealth of literature on teacher research or research carried out by teachers (see e.g. Borg and Sanchez 2015 on teacher research, and Benson and Reinders 2011 and Nunan and Richards 2015 on language learning beyond the language classroom). The benefits of teacher research are numerous and can be observed at many levels. The personal and professional growth of teachers, including increased self-confidence, motivation and collegiality, have been noted (Borg 2013, Lehtonen et al. 2015). The institutions where teachers are research-engaged have been observed to benefit from increased activity and sharing, among other things (Sharp 2007 as quoted in Borg and Sanchez 2015, Lehtonen et al 2015). Students who interact with research-engaged teachers also gain, because their teachers are better informed and more confident (Bell et al. 2010, as cited in Borg and Sanchez 2015).

The following chapter first deals with the structures supporting research engagement in the Helsinki University Language Centre. After that, a voice is given to an

individual teacher (one of the authors) to provide an ethnographic perspective on how research engagement can be motivated and started on an individual level.

3 Facilitating teacher research

Structures for research engagement

We stated above that (among) the most powerful drivers for research engagement seem to be personal professional development/growth and ambition, making professional life and teaching more fun, and creating ideas together with colleagues (i.e. collaborational aspects of development). We have more systematically discussed elsewhere (Lehtonen et al. 2015) how collegial practices and a collaborative working culture foster individual agency, which is, in the end, social in nature (Wertsch 1993, Wertsch et al. 1993). Collegiality and collaboration are the building blocks of work at the Language Centre of the University of Helsinki aiming to encourage teaching development based on research.

Among our collegial and collaborative practices, we have several occasions throughout the academic year when we invite and support research engagement. First, we have an annual calendar at the Language Centre to guarantee that there is common time to participate – approximately half of the Thursday afternoons throughout the academic year are dedicated to common events (two hours). Within these time slots, every academic year includes four research seminars, one of which is extended to a low-threshold mini-conference. One important means for research engagement is also our publication series, which we return to in Johanna Manner-Kivipuro's story in the next chapter.

One of the most fruitful drivers of research engagement has turned out to be the modules of the University Pedagogy course, tailored to language centre staff and designed as project courses. The network of Senior Lecturers in University Pedagogy (one lecturer in each faculty and independent institute of the University, see Toom et al. 2013) offer courses in their local institutions, and courses tailored for the language centre staff have been available since 2011⁵. Two recent courses (5 ECTS) have been designed as project courses. The courses in the past two years have concretely driven research engagement: *Advising and counselling in language learning* in the academic year 2013–2014 and *Assessment and feedback practices in language teaching* in 2014 to 2015. The project design of the courses has enabled teachers to engage in research projects according to their own interests, and to receive systematic support for their research throughout the process. The benefit has not only been research engagement by individual teachers but collaboration, in many cases across language units (between teachers of different languages and teaching cultures). Both project

⁵ A position of Senior Lecturer in University Pedagogy was established at the Language Centre in 2010. The position is held by one of the authors (Vaattovaara).

courses have culminated in a common Development Day, at which the projects have been presented and to which the staff of the Language Centre and other interested university colleagues have been invited. This, again, has raised interest in research engagement among many colleagues. Many of the projects will also be reported in published articles, thus making the research public.

Participating in the 5 ECTS University Pedagogy (UP) course is not officially included in the teachers' annual workload, that is, the participants' teaching load is not reduced. It is evident that teachers do at times struggle with time constraints while being involved with course activities – such as the research-based development project – but the fact that teachers participate in the UP course essentially “in their own time” has never raised questions of principal or problems, based on our experiences as the course instructor (Vaattovaara), a Language Unit head (Lehtonen) and a language teacher (Manner-Kivipuro). It seems that taking part in a UP course is generally understood more as a natural part of work than as starting a research project as such, or at least the hurdle is lower. Nevertheless, conducting research in the UP course is a valuable idea as such for supporting teachers' research engagement.

Other elements also play a role in research engagement at our Language Centre: a Research Support Group (consisting of many teachers, led by the Senior Lecturer in University Pedagogy) to discuss and propose ways to support research engagement (for example, planning seminar sessions, keeping a reading blog, i.e. virtual reading group), the annual possibility of including some research in the annual workload by application, and the possibility of applying for conference trips. All these activities together give a clear message of research engagement being appreciated, which is important from the point of view of teacher motivation as well.

The following exemplifies a teacher's experiences in becoming engaged in and with research while taking two University Pedagogy courses designed as project courses and offered to language teachers in particular⁶. Johanna's verbatim account will, in addition to reflecting on her professional growth, highlight some of our organisational support structures that boost teacher development through research (for a more thorough presentation, see Lehtonen et al. 2015).

The story of Johanna

I have always been interested in research, but have not until recent years deliberately focused on developing my skills and knowledge in research-oriented teaching. I attended both of the project-type University Pedagogy courses offered to language teachers during the academic years 2013–2014 and 2014–2015, and they have acted as an incentive to get a better grip on research as a part of professional life. Before these,

⁶ Johanna Manner-Kivipuro shared this account at the *Language Centres in Higher Education: Sharing Innovations, Research, Methodology and Best Practices*, in her presentation *Developing as a Professional* (co-presented with Johanna Vaattovaara).

I had also taken some University Pedagogy courses at the university where I worked earlier, but the experiences from the last two courses have been the most interesting and educational so far, because in both of these courses we have carried out collaborative research projects.

In the first course focusing on advising and counselling, I worked on a project with three colleagues. Our goal was to obtain information on different attitudes towards and experiences of advising and counselling among students and teachers, and we collected data on personal advising from the perspectives of students and their respective teachers. In the latter course, focusing on assessment and feedback in language learning, I worked with a pair, and here our goal was to develop a testing tool for students taking a bilingual exam in both oral and written skills (CEFR level C1).

The former project has assisted me in my daily work by indicating the importance and power of counselling and through new ideas on giving personal advice. The latter project was a development project we would have been engaged in even without attending the course, but with the help of the course framework and the systematic support, we had the possibility to obtain feedback in all stages of our planning process, from both fellow course participants and the course instructors. Furthermore, the project work enabled us to pay more attention to the theoretical background for our project and discuss it in the light of earlier research relevant to our work.

In his state-of-the-art article published in 2010, Simon Borg presented his rationale for why teachers would benefit from research engagement. In the following, I reflect on my own relationship with research by structuring my views according to Borg's work.

Research helps me get deeper sense of my work, and find new ways of seeing.

In the University Pedagogy courses, we worked on relatively small projects, but these projects helped us to see that research need not to be large in scale in order to be of importance. In other words, a doctoral thesis is not the only way to be able to find new ways of seeing and new ways of practicing. We had many discussions in the project groups and received immediate feedback on our thoughts from both our fellow course participants and course instructors. Sharing research data as well as the scientific literature helped me to gain new perspectives on the topics I was working on.

Research helps me identify ideas to experiment with in my classroom and find new ways of doing.

The varying tasks we carried out during the University Pedagogy courses have encouraged me to also test ideas in my own courses. During the UP courses, we not only read about theories but also tested ideas in practice. We have, for example, experimented with problem-based learning: we have solved a given case with the help of supporting pedagogical theories given as background material. We once participated in an oral group exam (rarely used in Finland) to get an experience of this form of assessment practice. In the latest course I attended, my colleague and I carried out

a research project on portfolios as an assessment tool and I became inspired to widen the use of portfolios to other contexts.

Research helps us extend our discourse for discussing teaching and find new ways of talking. *The University Pedagogy courses, with a research engagement orientation, focused not only on discussing what it is to teach students, but also on having discussions with other teachers, exchanging opinions and sharing information about ongoing projects that are research based. The participants were teachers at different stages of their professional career, and this not only provided a fruitful starting point to learn something new, but brought a variety of perspectives to project development discussions.*

Research helps me validate with a theoretical rationale what I already do and also find new ways of knowing. *During the University Pedagogy studies, we read some of the latest research to update our knowledge of the field. This means that I often familiarise myself with topics I have not heard of. The courses and the projects that I and my colleagues in other groups have worked on have offered me some theoretical tools and background that help me understand or explain what I already do, and they also function as an inspirational gateway to the field of research. For example, a research project by another group inspired me to test different ways of activating the students to give peer feedback.*

All the reading has developed my academic skills and deepened my expertise in what I do with students. New ways of knowing have also been advanced by the continuous feedback I have received from the lecturers. I feel that we teachers widen our academic skills even by giving presentations – by getting a chance to present the projects both orally and in an article format. Our publication series is a good tool here, because there is a clear target for publishing our results, and it is almost guaranteed that the paper will get through after the peer feedback processes. Writing an article on the basis of a project makes us discuss the project in a scientific framework, which brings a new aspect to “knowing”.

Research helps us examine our planning and decision-making processes and find new ways of thinking. *A University Pedagogy course is a safe environment to test my ideas, however wild they may be. Attending the course has sustained my daily motivation and helped me to develop new pedagogical ideas to be tested, but perhaps the most concrete and noticeable influence has been adopting research as both a tool and a source of inspiration as the foundation for planning and developing teaching strategies. This research engagement also feels like a natural part of my work, makes it meaningful and motivates me in finding new ways of thinking.*

Discussion and conclusion

In this article, we have dealt with the motivation for research engagement in the work of language teachers by using workshop data from the *Language Centres in Higher Education: Sharing Innovations, Research, Methodology and Best Practices* conference in Brno and a Finnish national survey (collected by the FINELC network) as a resource. After presenting the findings, which indicate that teachers are generally interested in or at least curious about research as part of their professional identity, we have discussed the importance of facilitation, by presenting some useful structures that have facilitated teacher research in the context of the University of Helsinki Language Centre.

Good practices include possibilities for conducting research together with colleagues, as well as opportunities to develop one's work through writing about it (Language Centre publication). A more ethnographic perspective is present in *Johanna's story* on research engagement, supported by the University Pedagogy course. This example shows how ways and practices of teaching development can grow through research engagement. An important aspect in fostering research engagement is collegiality or collaboration. For many teachers, doing research together is an important motivator, and our own publication series is a practical tool for finalising the projects (<https://helda.helsinki.fi/handle/10138/25140?locale-attribute=en>).

On the basis of the present data, our experiences and earlier workshops, as well as the research literature (e.g. Borg 2013), it seems that the barriers to as well as drivers for carrying out and following research are quite similar across language centres all over Europe, despite the fact that local circumstances vary: some language centres are more research friendly than others, and the institutional structures are not equally favourable in all places. However, if activities similar to those we have discussed can be fostered in language centres, research engagement will most probably grow. The "magic words" seem to be possibilities for collaboration and collegial support.

Among almost all the university language centres and their teachers we have come across so far, financial resources and (therefore) time are apparently the most commonly articulated barriers to research engagement. However, we have evidenced that if collaboration and some support are present, a more research-friendly environment emerges. It is also important that research engagement is appreciated by the managers.

We have expressed our belief that research engagement by teachers has the potential to benefit students, teachers and the wider community and to increase the quality of teaching and learning. Because we believe that promoting research engagement should not only be a local activity in our context, we are keen on establishing a co-operation network amongst the European language centres to share ideas and plan concrete actions. This was the second aim of the workshop held in Brno. Should you

be interested in becoming a member of such a network, please contact one of the authors.

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