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Editorial

Possible Research Paths for English Language Teacher-Researchers in the Wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly been one of those global events that force us to adjust our behavior patterns in practically all aspects of our lives. In relation to teaching, which is by definition an interactive and social activity (especially so in regard to foreign language teaching), its scope of action appears to have been reduced, at all levels, to distance education and virtual environments as the only available alternatives. Thanks to the digital era one could argue that the process of adaptation has been smooth; after all, teachers are no strangers to the use of digital platforms and computer assisted learning, as attested by the many articles revolving around these issues that have been published in the *Profile* journal (and in many others) since the turn of the century. However, and as implied above, the situation is new in that teachers have to rely almost exclusively on virtual methodologies to ensure learning processes; that is, they have been left with not much room for face-to-face interaction, which, arguably, is still paramount in reinforcing said learning processes.

Clearly, this situation has come with its own challenges, both for teachers and for students, and upcoming research in English language teaching is likely to focus on or revisit phenomena like (a) teacher burnout due to, for instance, overwork while preparing virtual lessons or to a lack of familiarity with digital tools; (b) the emotional responses of students and teachers during confinement and their experiences about working or studying from home; (c) class interaction mediated by electronic devices; (d) alternative assessment; (e) learning autonomy; and (f) the use of English as a lingua franca, among many other fertile topics.

What we learn from the current situation will certainly allow us, as teachers of English, to complement teaching practices and to take full advantage of what the digital era puts at our disposal so that students have a more comprehensive learning experience. This should also have an impact on teacher education which is expected to pay more attention to distance and virtual education. Additionally, and bearing in mind the increase in teachers' workload, it is also important to account for the factors that affect teachers' well-being in current times. Although *Profile* has not planned to devote special issues to gathering manuscripts around a unique theme, we would like to welcome contributions dealing with such issues.

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Another important aspect of the digital era that the pandemic has brought to the fore, and one which is related to current practices in academic publication, is the possibility of accessing available crucial knowledge immediately and without restriction; it is what lies at the core of the open-access movement. We, at the *Profile* journal, continue to embrace this spirit of sharing the insights of our authors in the hopes of advancing the academic knowledge of a growing community of scholars. Hence, at this critical moment, when access to trusted sources of information appears to be mainly obtained online, we also hope that the contents we publish for our readers in the journal site somehow contribute to the new teaching/learning dynamics.

Obviously, the quality of the journal contents could not be guaranteed without the invaluable help of our team of reviewers, to whom we want to express our acknowledgment and appreciation, especially in these trying times. Despite the disruptions brought about by the pandemic, our reviewers have kept on collaborating with the journal, which helps us in our objective of placing the journal as one of those trusted sources of high-quality academic information. The commitment of our reviewers, as well as that of our authors, is made visible in the articles selected for this issue.

In this issue, we are very pleased to share with you 12 articles. Eight correspond to the section *Issues from Teacher Researchers*, two to the section *Issues from Novice Teacher- Researchers* and two to the section *Issues Based on Reflections and Innovations*. The contributions come from four countries: Colombia, Chile, the United States of America, and Mexico.

The topics discussed by researchers in the current issue concern English language teaching, foreign language teacher education, and teacher professional development as regards (a) pre and in-service teachers, (b) novice and experienced school teachers and undergraduate and graduate foreign education students, (c) the development of skills from different perspectives and actors, as well as (d) language policies, assessment, and action research as the main topics.

The section *Issues from Teacher Researchers* opens with an article by Gloria Romero (Universidad de Santiago de Chile) that deals with English language teaching in the public, semiprivate, and private school contexts as provided by novice teachers. The paper reveals that novice teachers come across nonharmonic communities of teachers regardless of the types of schools where they work. Rather than being a detriment, these nonharmonic communities of practice positively impact novice teachers to strive during the first years of teaching. This article is followed by a paper dealing with language policies and elementary school teachers. Carmen Helena Guerrero-Nieto and Álvaro Quintero-Polo (Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, Colombia) showed how a bottom-up approach to the study of educational policies can shed some light on how elementary school teachers deal with educational policies to make them work. The study revealed that teachers are very aware of the influence of the neoliberalist ideas but find ways to make policies work while being critical of the way policies are designed and implemented.

Our issue continues with a contribution from Ximena D. Burgin and Mayra C. Daniel, (Northern Illinois University, USA). These researchers report on Ecuadorian preservice and

in-service teachers' ability to conduct action research in the classroom as well as their skills to efficiently adjust instruction to address students' cultural and linguistic diversity. Findings suggest that training teachers to conduct action research will improve their ability to analyze data and improve students' learning outcomes. Our next article deals with policies regarding the results of high school students in the English proficiency state exam in Colombia. Researcher Jorge Eliecer Benavides (Universidad de Nariño, Colombia) analyzes the above-mentioned results and shows a worrying panorama between the goals established by the Ministry of Education and the final outcomes. Benavides proposes a review of language policies, which according to the study must emerge from a bottom-up approach which means a sustained impulse in teacher training, methodology, and curricular and pedagogical organization.

The next two articles deal with the mastery of writing with different participants and perspectives. The first paper explores how master thesis writers position themselves in the English language teaching academic community. Researcher Vicky Ariza-Pinzón (Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Mexico) accompanies the process through which novel thesis writers approach this new and challenging task. The results show how postgraduate student-teachers draw from a set of interconnected genres—descriptions of the object of study, definitions, and personal exemplum—that build a shared experience with the reader as well as provide the persuasive purpose of the text. The second article deals with preservice teacher education as regards the impact reflective learning has in the academic writing skills of English as a foreign language preservice teachers. Researchers Angélica Meza (Instituto Caro y Cuervo, Colombia) and Ingrid Rodríguez and Lorena Caviades (Universidad El Bosque, Colombia) examined how the participants' academic writing skills developed when preparing for international writing exams while being accompanied by the researchers through reflections upon feedback and self-assessment. The results evidenced learners' writing skills improvement while implementing reflecting learning, which led to self-regulation and metacognition.

The last two articles of the section present research work coming from Mexico and Colombia. The Mexican contribution also deals with writing as the previous two papers but on this occasion analyzed from the perspective of teachers who teach writing. Elsa Fernanda González (Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas, Mexico) explores the classroom assessment process of 11 Mexican teachers in the writing component through the incorporation of training. The results suggest an impact in three main areas: classroom teaching of writing, classroom assessment of writing, and teacher self-awareness. The Colombian study examines the relationship between an action research study about the exploration of local communities and the emergence of agency and value of rural identity. Results showed that when communities are linked with classroom practices and foreign language learning, English becomes a vehicle to explore their places, who they are as members of the community, and how to promote decision-making to help others. The researchers who worked on this fascinating quest were Lucelly Paredes-Mendez, Ingrid Alexandra Troncoso-Rodríguez and Sandra Patricia Lastra-Ramírez (Universidad del Tolima, Colombia).

Section 2, *Issues From Novice Teacher-Researchers*, includes two articles. Both of them come from representatives of Colombian universities located in different geographical points of the Colombian territory. Estefanía Durán and Katherin García from the Universidad de Pamplona, North-Eastern Colombia, explore the influence of English teachers' methodological practices on the learning processes of English as a foreign language undergraduate students. The methodological approaches of teachers varied and these influenced students' learning processes differently. From the Southern region of Colombia, specifically from the Universidad de la Amazonia, researcher Jaime Fernando Duque-Aguilar explores the assessment of speaking in a teacher education program as well. Results revealed teachers' preference for summative assessment practices to determine students' progress regarding speaking. The author proposes language assessment as a meaningful process in which students, teachers, and the institution involved should benefit.

Our issue closes with the section *Issues Based on Reflections and Innovations*. In this opportunity we welcome a joint venture between a Chilean researcher and an American one and the contribution of a Colombian academic. The joint effort between Malba Barahona (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile) and Kristin J. Davin (University of North Carolina at Charlotte, USA), tackles teacher education from the perspective of a practice-based approach in which student-teachers learn to teach a language by engaging in "actual" teaching rather than "talking" about teaching. They report on the implementation of a practice-based approach in two different contexts: an initial English teacher education program in Chile and an initial foreign language teacher education program in the United States. The findings demonstrate that incorporating a practice-based approach offers a useful affordance for examining and illuminating the complexities of foreign language teaching practice across contexts. Finally, we have the contribution made by researcher Frank Giraldo (Universidad de Caldas, Colombia). The reflection made by Giraldo examines the connections that exist between language assessment literacy and teachers' professional development. The article signals that there are existing language assessment literacy initiatives, and however limited they might be, they have the potential to advance teachers' language assessment literacy at large and contribute to their professional development.

As always, we hope that you find this new edition useful and interesting. Enjoy it!

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