

## Research Seminars in TESOL and Language Studies

### The University of Sydney TESOL Research Network

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## Messy research in TESOL: methodological realities, problems and honest reporting when educational research goes awry

**Jim McKinley & Heath Rose**

University College London and Oxford University

**Date:** Wednesday 25 July 2018

**Time:** 17.00 – 18.30 pm

**Venue:** Education 325, The University of Sydney

Much published research in applied linguistics presents research methodology as an uncompromising process, where problems are pre-empted in precise research design. However, applied linguistics research is often messy, especially when studies involve real-life educational contexts, as is typical in TESOL-related research. Marshall and Rossman (2010), argue the “pristine” and “logical” representation of research in journal articles is in contrast to the reality of social research, which is often “confusing, messy, intensely frustrating, and fundamentally nonlinear” (p. 55). Mellor (2001) argues that the provision of an ‘honesty trail’ of the problems encountered and mistakes made in practitioner-based research in particular forms an essential part to a study’s strength, even if by conventional definitions highlighting these issues posed a threat to the project’s validity.

In this talk, we showcase some of the methodological problems encountered in TESOL-related research projects that, despite obstacles, were eventually successful. In discussing the ‘messiness’ of research, we bring the methodological obstacles to the forefront to illustrate situations where researchers need to adapt their research methods *in situ*. The talk aims to provide novice and experienced researchers alike with an overview of the realities of doing interdisciplinary social research in applied linguistics/TESOL and offers advice on overcoming similar methodological problems.



Jim McKinley is an Associate Professor of TESOL and Applied Linguistics at the Institute of Education, University College London (9/2018-). His main research interests include second language writing and internationalization of higher education. He has published in journals including *Applied Linguistics*, *Higher Education*, and *RELC*, and is co-editor of *Doing Research in Applied Linguistics: Realities, Dilemmas and Solutions* (Routledge, 2017).



Heath Rose is an Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics in the Department of Education at the University of Oxford. His research interests are in Global Englishes and TESOL. He has published in *Applied Linguistics*, *Modern Language Journal*, and *Language Policy*. He is co-author of the book *Introducing Global Englishes* (Routledge, 2015) and *Global Englishes for Language Teaching* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

**Enquiries:** Aek Phakiti ([aek.phakiti@sydney.edu.au](mailto:aek.phakiti@sydney.edu.au)). This is a free seminar.

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