

## Book review

### Teacher-Researchers in Action

Edited by Dilikitas, K., R. Smith and W. Trotman, IATEFL Research Special Interest Group, 2015, Pp. i-438, ISBN 978-1-901095-71-5

*Teacher-Researchers in Action* was published following the 2014 IATEFL Research Special Interest Group Conference which took place at Gediz University in Turkey and offers a compilation of short but insightful classroom-based inquiry reported by teachers in higher education settings. The book is divided into three parts: part one provides a theoretical framework for classroom research emphasising the active role of the teacher in influencing and defining praxis; part two showcases a series of short but well thought out interventions, illustrating how teachers can become engaged in classroom-based enquiry. Finally, chapter three considers how teacher-researchers can be supported and what can be done in order to develop and use their research skills to enhance the teaching and learning experience.

A wealth of resources has been produced on the topic of teaching and researching over the years and although these two areas of professional practice still appear to be in conflict for many ELT practitioners in several parts of the world, the book becomes a good example of how intrinsically connected these aspects are. Such interconnectedness between teaching and researching is developed in part one, consisting of four chapters, where the reader is led to consider the aspects of *collaborative practice* (A. Burns), the role of *understanding* for both teachers and learners through *Exploratory Practice* (D. Allwright), *exploratory action research* (R. Smith) and how teachers can become effective researchers of their own practice. The purpose of this part is not only to introduce the topic of the book but also provide a conceptual framework emerging from the grounded experience of practising teacher-researchers. As such, part one illustrates how theory proceeds and informs practice and it becomes a prime example of the ‘liberating’ effects of classroom action research and exploratory practice, a topic which has been visited and revisited in many sources.

Part two comprises 18 case studies ranging from the role of corrective feedback and lesson observation to enhancing motivation through reflection, and language anxiety. These are concise reports of classroom-based research where teachers took an active role to improve their teaching actions and their students' learning experience. All the case studies featured in part two manage to highlight the fact that when teachers adopt an inquisitive approach and are willing to use their practice as a research tool, it is possible to identify problems, use reflection to design pedagogical interventions to address such problems, apply those interventions and then critically evaluate results. What is important about these studies is that the topics of the case studies in part two are very relevant to EFL practitioners regardless of the level of instruction or educational settings where they teach as some of the topics are rather 'universal' and, therefore, of general interest. Bearing this in mind, part two becomes an example of research-informed teaching where teachers, instead of using theoretical postulates formulated by others, generate their own theories depending on the characteristics of their teaching contexts to meet the needs of their students more effectively and to develop their own professional skills. It is evident after reading part two that classroom research becomes a good, if not the most effective, tool for continuous professional development.

Part three is made up of five chapters and although the rationale underpinning their inclusion is not made explicit, it is possible to notice that the over-arching linking feature is future directions for classroom-based research in terms of both topics and initiatives to promote and support teacher-researchers. For instance, the opening chapter in part three deals with the problem of attribution retraining, which is identified as one of the under-researched areas in the field of Second Language Acquisition. Although there is no actual case reported in this chapter, the review of literature alone has a potential to create an agenda for future inquiry. The other chapters within part three deal with programmes attempting to develop a capacity for inquiry-based teaching by presenting examples of and evaluating different initiatives within the Turkey context. It is particularly interesting to notice that the experiences reported managed to increase teaching cognition emphasising the fact that teacher-researchers are in a true sense professional learners whose learning is situated in their own practice.

Overall the book provides some interesting food for thought and it calls for the need to develop teachers' research skills challenging the status quo, which, for a long time, has been based on a dialectical tension between teaching and researching as a binary combination. Whilst reading each chapter, it is possible to notice the benefits of classroom-based research and how teachers can enhance both teaching and learning outcomes. Detractors of this approach tend to highlight that the localised applications of classroom inquiry makes it difficult to generalise findings and, therefore, question the validity of the approach. Without looking at the fallacies of this argument, the book

manages to convey the message that teachers who are researchers of their practice, either in Turkey, Russia or Argentina, have a real potential to generate, transform and re-interpret praxis.

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