

Book review

Developing as an EFL researcher: Stories from the field

Edited by Sian Etherington & Mark Daubney,
Faversham, Kent: IATEFL, 2017, Pp 85,
ISBN: 978-1-901095-8 (Adobe e-reader).

Developing as an EFL researcher: Stories from the field is the concrete result of a dazzling array of shared experiences put forward by teacher researchers in the context of the Research Special Interest Groups (ReSIG) Pre-Conference Event of the same name during the 2015 IATEFL in Manchester. The meeting comprised a series of poster presentations that aimed to “bring together different participants' experiences of their personal journeys of evolutions as researchers” (Etherington & Daubney, 2017) in the TESOL/EFL area. In this respect, the book depicts to depict vividly the sense of community and friendly ambiance that seized the conference venue. Hence, this compilation of researchers' anecdotes told in the first person typifies a valuable and comprehensible guide for those novice teachers who are planning to embark on the research journey, and practitioners who are already immersed in teacher research. The book addresses explicitly the complexity of research, acknowledges its challenges, and proposes gently a plethora of actions to tackle them.

The book begins with an Introduction by Sian Etherington that sets the context of the ReSIG pre-conference, the characteristics of the participants and the dynamics of the presentations. At this point, the main strands of the programme are stated along with a brief introduction to the authors' papers. The section concludes with the editor's personal reflection of the event. The researchers' experiences are compiled and organized into the three Strands that guided the (ReSIG) Pre-Conference Event:

- Strand 1: A researcher's journey: Challenges, issues and strategies
- Strand 2: Specific methods and specific challenges



- Strand 3: Identities, roles, relationships and contexts in research

Each strand is set off by the words of an “Impulse speaker” that pave the way for the learning experiences that will contribute to the main purpose of each section. Finally, the book ends with a “Panel discussion summary” that highlights the salient points discussed throughout the presentations, and an “Afterword” section by Mark Daubney sharing his personal appreciation of the conference.

Strand 1 has David Nunan as “Impulse speaker” who, through the telling of the shocking experience that led him to become a researcher, encourages the readers to start evoking memories of their own practice as a warm-up for the exciting upcoming stories. The first narrative features Irena Meatrovik Stajduhar who, under the title “The growing pains of a young researcher”, identifies accurately the stages every research undergoes in the unfolding of a research identity. Next, Becky Steven’s striking narrative, entitled “My research journey: ripples in a big pond”, defies teachers’ beliefs on research and goes further to foster professionalism in Education. Then, the presentation called “Using exploratory practice to develop teacher research” by Assia Slimani-Rolls introduces a new approach to research that proves to be innovative and prolific in terms of revealing insights into the challenges in the teaching practice. Last but not least, Alexia Piaggio in “My journey as a researcher” shares the frustrations and burdens proper to research as well as the lessons she was taught while doing her MA.

Strand 2 is hosted by Dr. Sue Garton who narrows the scope and deals specifically with the complexity, messiness and constraints of qualitative research that would appeal to most readers no matter their background. These topics are prominent and evident in the experiences coming after, yet they are accompanied by the proposal of diverse and reassuring strategies to tackle these challenges. The strand continues with Sian Etherington’s comparison of research to an artwork in her paper “Mess and method: Researching Others’ Realities”. This telling metaphor presents, in my opinion, the core essence of the book since it adopts a more democratic and inclusive approach to research, one that allows realities to be interpreted at once without the obstacle of a biased interpretation. Next, it is the turn for “Writing for research purposes: crossing the love-hate line” by Volha Arkhipenka who humbly portrays how literature led her to fell in love with writing and how this encouraged her to embark on research as the vehicle to be heard. Finally, the strand has the life couple Stephanie Xerri Agius and Daniel Xerri present “A shared research journey”, a work that goes deeper into the challenges, tensions and conflict of collaborative research as well as the prolific results it has yielded in the participants’ professional lives. This experience will particularly resonate with those teachers working with colleagues in collaborative research projects as it covers the technical as well as the affective implications of research.

Strand 3 features Professor Cynthia White of Massey University whose paper embodies the umbrella term for this section: affectivity in research. The subsequent

anecdotes will exclusively be restricted to cope with emotional conflicts and tensions between teaching and research. First, Tien Minh Mai through the narrative entitled “What dilemmas have I faced as a researcher?” teaches us that teaching and research are not necessarily two opposite poles, but they complement each other. Therefore, teachers will definitely start visualizing the advantages of taking some time out to reflect and write about their own practice. Second, Mark Daubney in “The role of tensions, constraints and opportunities in shaping researcher identity” shares how he managed to combat the apprehension coming from the complexity of research and the constraints while being an EFL teacher. Similarly, Susanna Shwab coincides with Daubney’s assertion on the role affectivity plays in the fruition of research, in “From the novice EFL teacher to teacher educator to researcher”. Finally, Susan Dawson, whose paper is entitled “On wearing two hats: ‘Practitioner researcher’ and ‘doctoral researcher’”, and Ines.K Miller and Waleska G.Braga, in “Why is it so complex to balance trust, autonomy and control? Challenges faced in a teacher education programme”, come up with the emotional factors involved when undertaking research based on Exploratory Practice, the implication for both participants in practitioner research and the vulnerability in the mentor-trainee relationship.

All in all, *Developing as an EFL researcher: Stories from the field* is a book that embraces many voices. Educators from different social and educational contexts gather together, in the frame of the ReSIG Pre-Conference Event, to share experiences in the field of TESOL/EFL research and put on the table the challenges encountered in the journey. This compilation report made out of researchers’ experiences definitely serves its purpose by practicing what it preaches: communication in research as a contribution towards the building of knowledge in the educational community. The novice teacher is bound to find in the book a practical guide for research study on the teaching practice and further educational issues. The vivid depiction of the researchers’ stories will surely cause deep resonance in teachers-to-be, and encourage self-reflection and self-criticality on the teaching activity, with the only purpose of vindicating professionalization in EFL teaching.

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