

## Book review

### **Children and teachers as co-researchers: A handbook of activities**

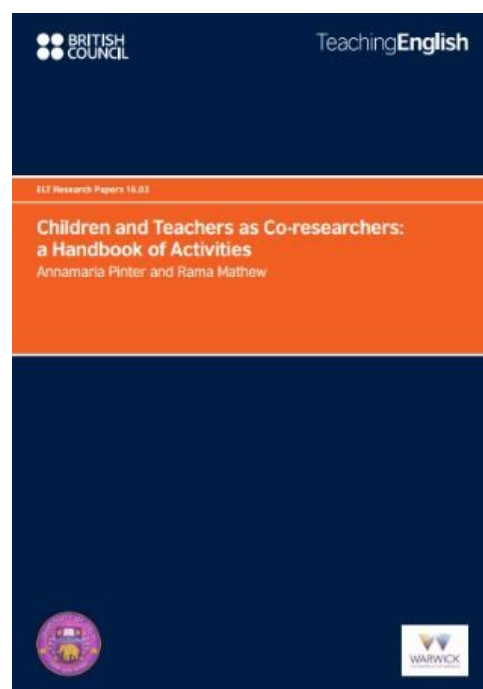
Annamaria Pinter and Rama Mathew

London: British Council 2016, 102pp  
ISBN: 978-0-86355-856-6, PDF, free download at  
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*Children and Teachers as Co-researchers: a Handbook of Activities*, authored and edited by Annamaria Pinter and Rama Mathew, is the result of a compilation of numerous experiences that took place in different classrooms in India. It constitutes a book every teacher should have at hand as a source for inspiration for their daily work due to its conciseness, clarity and good organization.

The aim of this handbook is to illustrate its target audience - English teachers of young learners - the extent to which it is important to strive for innovation in their practices in order to make lessons attractive and meaningful to their students; but fundamentally, it encourages teachers to become researchers in their own classrooms, continuously searching for new alternatives to enrich their practices. In order to do this, the authors provide readers with extensive information on how a series of innovative practices were carried out by teachers in India, as well as the level of success they got in those particular contexts.

All the activities include a title and are followed by the name of the teacher in charge of the group, the age of the students, the timing, the materials needed and the class organization employed. Next, a step-by-step description on the procedure is provided as well as a final summary of the main ideas and suggestions from the editors on alternative ways to carry out the same activity. Finally, either a work sample or a picture showing students in action is provided.



These activities are divided into six sections, each representing a theme. Although they are presented in numerical order, it is possible for the readers to start from any section. They are as follows: Section 1: Trying out something new, containing 6 activities; Section 2: Children making choices, containing 8 activities; Section 3: Teachers handing over control to children, containing 7 activities; Section 4: Building positive relationships, containing 4 activities; Section 5: Designing research tools and analysing empirical data, containing 11 activities; and Section 6: Feedback and self/peer-assessment, which consists of 9 activities.

Throughout the first section readers will find six examples in which teachers took a step out their comfort zones and tried something different and refreshing with their students, taking into account the context in which they were carrying out the project. In many cases, this sense of innovation was reached just through making small adjustments, changing some details in the way teachers were used to performing certain activities. However, the results obtained regarding students' enthusiasm and involvement were outstanding, and thus highly motivating for those teachers who took their first step towards innovation in their practices.

In the second section, called "Children making choices," by being given the chance to make some decisions concerning their classwork, students' sense of responsibility on their own learning processes was enhanced. The positive impact of the delegation of some responsibilities to students in the classroom is something teachers repeatedly read about in pedagogical theory; however, this handbook provides empirical evidence on the issue, which is far more useful thus valuable for English Teachers and their practices.

In section 3, "Teachers handing over control to children," readers find seven examples of activities in which young learners of English are given the opportunity to create their own learning tasks, and even their own materials. Teachers' roles change, they stop being the leaders of the classroom and turn into supporters who unobtrusively accompany students' learning processes.

The fourth section, "Building positive relationships," clearly illustrates the way in which the themes mentioned in the previous sections have benefited the relationship among teachers and their students. Having given them the opportunity to decide on the way they preferred to work and the tasks they were more interested in, contributed not only to their getting to know one another but also allowed for a friendly and secure learning environment.

In section 5, "Designing research tools and analysing empirical data," readers will see that apart from choosing and designing their own learning activities, children were also given the opportunity to design their own research tools, which were mainly interviews and questionnaires. Students' reactions and outcomes from these research experiences concerning others' opinions and beliefs are clearly described in this section.

The last section, called "Feedback and self/peer-assessment," is related to activities oriented to give and receive feedback on the work they have done. Students' perceptions towards their own productions, their level of maturity, responsibility and empathy while performing the tasks are described and illustrated throughout this section, this time

encouraging teachers to avoid underestimating children's capacity to engage not only with playful activities but also with those requiring seriousness on their part.

"Children and Teachers as Co- researchers: a Handbook of Activities" is a really enjoyable book to read which, in my opinion, has successfully achieved its main goal: it provides a clear and succinct guide for English teachers from all around the world who want to innovate in their practices. Since each activity, explained step by step in a chart, is preceded by a title, the student's age and the materials needed, and followed by some appreciations concerning the results obtained as well as a picture to illustrate the groups' work, they are easy to follow and or adapt according to the group and the context in which they are going to be applied.

In conclusion, the practicality, the clear language, examples and explanations found throughout the handbook, as well as the effective way in which its objectives of encouraging teachers to become researchers in their own classrooms were reached by turning readers into witnesses of the motivation and enthusiasm showed by the participants of the research and, fundamentally, by demonstrating to readers how rewarding this can be, certainly deserve being highlighted. I strongly recommend "Children and Teachers as Co- researchers: a Handbook of Activities" to primary and secondary teachers, especially new teachers, willing to take risks and have fun while looking for new ways to improve students' learning experiences.

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