

Editorial

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Introduction

We are delighted to bring you the latest issue (Issue 34) of *ELT Research*, an IATEFL Research Special Interest Group (ReSIG) annual publication. Since our last issue in early 2018, there have been significant changes to the editorial team; Harry Kuchah Kuchah (from Cameroon, but based in the UK) stepped down as co-editor to become Vice President of IATEFL; Ana Inés Salvi (from Argentina, but also based in the UK) similarly stepped down as co-editor, on becoming Joint Coordinator of the IATEFL Research SIG. We wish them well. New co-editors joining Mark Wyatt (UK, but based in the UAE) include Emily Edwards (Australia), Darío Luis Banegas (Argentina) and Amol Padwad (India), and so the editorial team remains very international in outlook, whilst also representing geographical contexts that have not been represented on the editorial board before. Our identities have doubtless shaped the contents of this issue, which also and more importantly reflect key emerging themes in *ELT Research*: teacher and student identity; 'exploratory' research and practice; teachers in higher education increasingly researching their practices (though we would also like to encourage more contributions from school teachers); greater research activity amongst ELT professionals in Latin America. We discuss these key themes below, before introducing the articles, which we have grouped in the following sections: reports of practice in teacher education; research reports; reflective reports; conference reports; and book reviews.

The first key theme that we will draw attention to is 'teacher and student identity'. Notions of 'identity', which refers to how we understand our relationships with the world, and how these *are* and *can be* constructed across time and space (Norton, 1997), are increasingly seen as important for wellbeing in the language classroom (Barkhuizen, 2017). Growing awareness that supporting identity construction is crucial has been accompanied by other recent related research developments, e.g. interest in empowering students to become more autonomous in their own language learning, during which they may negotiate alternative, second language identities (Morita, 2004); and provision in teacher education to support teachers' emotional and motivational as well as cognitive development (Ončevska Ager & Wyatt, 2019). Accompanying the current worldwide burgeoning of practitioner research networks in ELT, there is increasing concern with supporting language teacher-researcher identity negotiation and development (Banegas, 2012; Edwards & Burns, 2016). Several articles in this issue explore different facets of student, teacher and teacher-researcher identity.

The second theme is a noticeable emphasis on 'exploratory' approaches to practitioner research. Exploratory Practice (EP) (Allwright & Hanks, 2009) and Exploratory Action Research (EAR) (Smith & Rebodello, 2018) are two ways that teachers and learners can reflect on their practice to better understand what is happening in the classroom, and to inform and reflect on any changes they may wish to make to teaching and learning. Both EP and EAR highlight the importance of classroom research that is manageable, sustainable, and that ensures 'quality of life' for all those involved. These exploratory approaches provide valuable frameworks for teachers keen to engage in some practical research, especially those who are new to research and those who may be working in challenging contexts (e.g. large classrooms, heavy workloads, few resources). It is therefore not surprising that this issue sees several practitioners reporting on their experiences of using an 'exploratory' framework, and where the term Action Research is preferred, the exploratory dimensions of this approach are also emphasised. In addition, two book reviews of recent EP and EAR publications round off the issue.

The third theme is the predominance of articles authored by practitioners from higher education contexts, including English for Academic or Specific Purposes (EAP or ESP) programmes, and pre- or in-service language teacher education programmes. This theme has prompted us to wonder whether classroom-based research happens more frequently in higher education (compared to primary and secondary school contexts), or whether higher education practitioners are more likely to end up writing about their studies. Perhaps both premises are valid. It is likely that conditions are more conducive for practitioner research in universities, with access to resources including time, funding, and incentives or even requirements to publish. Outside of university contexts, there may be greater hurdles to ELT teacher research. Apart from limited resources, such hurdles might also include sociocultural and conceptual barriers preventing teacher research from being accepted and valued, and emerging teacher-researcher identities not being adequately supported (Edwards, 2018). We strongly encourage practitioner researchers in all settings to write about, and/or visually represent, their classroom research in future issues.

The last key theme is about geographical location. We are happy to see so many articles from a region which does not usually feature in international publications. To some extent, the articles from Argentina and Colombia respond to Banegas' (2018) call for the spreading of international knowledge of ELT and a stronger presence of Latin American educators in international conferences and publications given the long-standing presence of ELT and English language teacher education in South America. The contributions are research reports based on case studies and reflective articles set in different levels of education and with links to concepts such as

teacher identity, interculturality, criticality, teacher research, and professional development. It is also worth mentioning that the South American contributions come from less known institutions and cities thus decentring ELT from big cities and universities. We now provide more information about the contents.

Contents

The first section includes three reports of practice in teacher education, all from university contexts. In the first report, Stephan Gabel and Katja Heim describe a 'Low-Threshold Approach' to Action Research (AR) for pre-service English language teachers during their school placements in Germany. They discuss the challenges and successes of this AR approach, and reflect on the development of the student teachers' autonomy, which includes an improved understanding of the context-specific nature of 'good teaching'. The second report is by Ana Cad, who also introduces an AR framework – specifically, Exploratory Action Research (EAR) – to pre-service TESOL teachers completing their practicum in Argentinian secondary schools. Like Stephan and Katja, Ana found that the teachers benefited from making connections between research and practice, felt empowered by the knowledge gained, and more confident about integrating research into their future teaching. In the final report of practice in teacher education, Jermaine McDougald and Liliana Cuesta Medina discuss ways of scaffolding the thesis writing process for Spanish-speaking in-service English language teachers in Colombia. Jermaine and Liliana describe their curriculum redesign in light of the challenges faced by student teachers writing in their second language, and their revised approach includes a range of individual and multi-directional scaffolds.

The second section consists of five research reports set in different countries and educational levels. Authored by Julia Garbi, the first case study-based report examines a group of primary school learners' cultural identities in La Plata, Argentina. The second report also set in Argentina investigates how an ESP class at university level may become a space for minority groups. Gabriela Tavella and Carina Fernández highlight that intercultural exchanges and awareness-raising can help future professionals develop a more complex sense of identities and cultures in the region where they study and live. In the third report, Athanassia Iosifidou employs a survey approach to explore the importance of engaging international ESL students with the community in which they study. Set in Australia, the findings reveal that while community engagement is meaningful, projects of this nature need school support. Contextualised in English language teacher education, the fourth report illustrates the use of narrative inquiry and poetic inquiry to understand student-teachers' identity. Author Cristina Sarasa suggests that helping student-teachers write about their teachers and teacher educators contributes to understanding professional and personal identity. In the final report, Peter Brereton

draws on qualitative research to investigate English language teachers' experiences of demotivation, their factors and consequences and how demotivation can be overcome. To this effect, the author included teachers located in different countries in order to find commonalities across diverse contexts.

The next section contains reflective reports. In the first of these, Gary Barkhuizen analyses his journey as a researcher, from moving beyond his doctoral studies that focused ethnographically on classroom interaction to him developing an abiding research interest in uncovering people's personal experiences; he explains how engaging in narrative enquiry led to narrative knowledging and then using this research methodology in focusing on language teacher identity. The second reflective report is by Maria Marta Mora, who describes discovering her identity as a novice teacher-researcher in a Buenos Aires school; Maria was supported in this by feeling part of a community of teacher-researchers, with an IATEFL ReSIG conference in Buenos Aires and contacts she made through it and online afterwards being particularly influential. She indicates that teacher-research activity has helped her find her voice and share those of her students. The third reflective report is by Chris Banister, who recalls becoming an exploratory practitioner in an EAP setting in a British university and recounts his trajectory since. Chris reflects on engaging his learners in puzzling on an assessed course in a supportive, collegial environment in which exploratory practice is encouraged.

In the next section, we present conference reports. In the first of these, Ernesto Vargas Gil reflects on the IATEFL ReSIG pre-conference event in Brighton in April 2018. This was a joint event with the Learner Autonomy SIG; it featured Phil Benson and Judith Hanks as plenary speakers, and sixteen poster presenters. A format including poster presentations is one that has worked successfully at ReSIG events since the 2014 IATEFL pre-conference day in Harrogate (Bullock & Smith, 2015). In his report, Ernesto muses on the connections between autonomy and practitioner research, and highlights the quality of the interaction and networking that took place on the day. Similarly very positive about a participant-centred event featuring poster presentations is Marianna Serra. She reports on '*Teachers Research! Istanbul 2018*', the fourth annual ReSIG conference in Turkey, which was held in June 2018 at Bahçeşehir University. Marianna reflects on attending talks and workshops given by speakers including Gary Barkhuizen, Angi Malderez and Kenan Dikilitaş, on giving a poster presentation herself, and on the kind of knowledge generated by the interactive conference.

Finally, we complete the issue by presenting two book reviews, by Dick Allwright and Jennifer Wallace respectively. These provide valuable insights into recent books about EP (authored by Judith Hanks and Kenan

Dikilitaş) and EAR (authored by Richard Smith and Paula Rebolledo). Enjoy!

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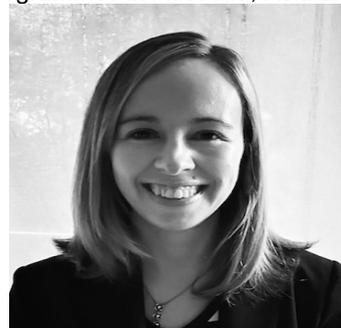
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About the editors of this issue of ELT Research

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