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Ernesto Vargas Gil is a PhD researcher at the University of Warwick. He is an Associate Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and an experienced, Cambridge Delta-qualified, EAP teacher. He has translated books from English to Spanish, and has research interests in Language Teacher Education and Teacher Autonomy. Email: vargasgilernesto@yahoo.com

My reflections on Teachers Research! Istanbul 2018

Mariana Serra

IATEFL Research SIG scholarship

Since I received an Aptsis Action Research Award (British Council) in 2015, I have been inspired by the idea of teachers as researchers in their classrooms as a way to pursue Professional Development. The ARAS scheme which enabled me to implement my first Action Research study in a low resource classroom in a rural state school in Argentina, provided me with an opportunity to develop my professional practice and to receive feedback from a team of international mentors. It made me realise that teacher-initiated research is a powerful way for us to learn about our own teaching as well as to become more experienced at investigating our own practice.

As soon as I was informed that I had been awarded an IATEFL Research SIG scholarship to enable me to attend the 'Teachers Research!' 2018 conference in Turkey, I did not hesitate to fly from my country to Istanbul to attend the event. This was with the hope of being able to share the results of one of my action research case studies and to apply the knowledge I would acquire during the conference back in Argentina; my goal is to contribute to Argentinian education, especially in rural and poor areas. I knew it would be a professionally rewarding experience. I was absolutely right! As well as the previous Teachers Research Conferences in Chile (2016) and Buenos Aires (2017) that I had participated in, Teachers Research! Istanbul 2018 was an invaluable opportunity which exceeded my expectations.

Day 1 and day 2

After welcoming remarks and opening speeches, June 8th and June 9th achieved the goals of the conference as it was a participant-centred event during which there were plenary talks, workshops by keynote speakers and poster presentations by teachers and prospective teachers from Turkey and beyond. During both days, the activities developed smoothly in a pleasant and informal atmosphere with coffee breaks and intervals providing

fruitful opportunities for attendees to meet people in the field, to interact and to get new and innovative ideas.

On day 1, Gary Barkhuizen's plenary talk on the importance of short stories in teacher research was particularly inspirational as he encouraged us to use stories of our teaching practice to explore our own teachers' work while 'On Noticing', the workshop by Angi Malderez which took place on day 2, was a sixty-minute unique experience. That renowned researcher made us reflect on the meaning of noticing and observing, of reviewing, and on the importance of becoming attentive teachers and better noticers while teaching. Erdem Akbas and Kenan Dikilitaş' workshop on 'teacher researcher reflective writing' as an emerging genre was memorable to me, as I became highly enthusiastic about trying it as part of my own personal development. I soon realised that I could see my written outputs as written representations of the level of understanding that I achieve every time I implement a research project: some sort of proof of my depth of learning. There were other memorable workshops, according to many teacher attendees, with clips recorded live and uploaded by one of the organisers. Last but not least, I was impressed by the hard work carried out by prospective teachers, which was reflected in their poster presentations, their commitment and desire to share their Action Research case studies and to get feedback from the audience.

My poster presentation

Being a poster presenter myself, I was very passionate when giving my presentation on the "Effectiveness of Praise-Question-Encourage commenting guidelines during teacher-written feedback on EFL learners' rewrites". While talking about it, I remembered the happy faces of my student participants during the implementation of that project, our one-to-one written conversations in their journals, my comments of praise on their positive progress in their drafts, my further questioning and my encouragement through feedback. I reported that my students became successful writers and that *P-Q-E* commenting guidelines provided me with a useful strategy to help them improve their writing skills. I concluded that the implementation of formative teacher-written feedback in supporting the developing writers helped to encourage the skills and habits needed for draft revision at a deep level as well.

After our five-minute talk in front of our posters, there was time for interaction with the audience, which consisted of academics and teachers. It was an excellent opportunity to get feedback, to ask for advice, to get valuable insights and to learn from each of the attendees. Our poster presentations were followed by a round-up discussion led by a moderator. I was delighted to have learnt so much from my teacher partners, as regards for example, the implementation of technological tools during teacher feedback, that I recorded many of their ideas for future projects. Such a lively discussion was taking place that we did not realise that time was

over until our moderator apologised for having to stop us.



Figure 1. Mariana Serra standing next to her poster

In person networking and social media networking

Last but not least, I would like to mention that the opportunity to network was an important part of Teachers Research! Istanbul 2018. Both, in person networking and social media networking took place during and after the event. While the first characterised the conference from beginning to end, social media networking happened during and after the conference with the Research SIG hosting a week-long online discussion to trigger further dialogue on topics related to teacher-researchers. Click on this link and follow the instructions to join the Yahoo Group for free <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/resig/> and link to the Teachers Research! 2018 event: <http://iateflresig2018istanbul.com/>

Conclusion

Teachers Research! Istanbul 2018 provided a unique convergence of networking, learning, sharing and fun into a single package. I brought back to Argentina the essence of the conference, a strong will to share what I had learnt, constructive ideas to become a better mentor and commitment to continue improving my own practice as a teacher researcher in my own classroom.

Teacher researchers create teacher knowledge. We use that knowledge in powerful actions of change in our classrooms to solve real site-based problems. As teacher researchers, we are not only doers but we are also active and engaged learners. As a teacher who undertakes research projects in my classrooms, I strongly believe that research is a key factor to empowering and generating educational and personal growth. Research holds greater promise for teachers as educational leaders. Let us continue being engaged in research! Good teachers are good researchers.

Mariana Serra is an Argentinian teacher of English and a licentiate in English (UNL). She was one of the winners of Aptis for Teachers Action Research Awards (British Council) in 2015 and in 2016/2017. In 2018 she was invited to participate as a moderator during Classroom

Based research EVO 2018. E-mail: marianaserra2@gmail.com



Figure 2. A group photo at the end of the conference

Review of 'Developing language teachers with Exploratory Practice: Innovations and explorations in language education', edited by Kenan Dikilitaş and Judith Hanks, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2018.

Dick Allwright

The role of practitioner research in language teacher development is well recognised, but Dikilitaş and Hanks make a valuable and important additional contribution by demonstrating, via eight impressive case study chapters, how Exploratory Practice (EP) can be a practical, productive and sustainable form for that research.

The editors introduced EP to the case study writers, language teaching professionals in varied roles and institutions, through an extensive mentoring project conducted in Turkey and North Cyprus in 2015. After their very useful general Introduction, the editors present the project's rationale and procedures in a well-argued and important Chapter 2.

The Introduction sets out EP's framework of 'Principles for fully inclusive practitioner research' (pp. 2-3). This provides a structure for the case studies, which can be read in any order, after Chapter 2, because they all reference this framework. My evaluation of the chapters below is also structured using this framework.

Three criteria are offered for evaluating the whole volume when the editors say (p. 2) they want their book to contribute by: