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SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

**RESEARCH LITERACY: SUPPORTING TEACHER
RESEARCH IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING**

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SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

Research literacy: Supporting teacher research in English Language Teaching · Part 1

Educational research: A reflection

Adriano de Armado: How hast thou purchased this experience?

Moth: By my penny of observation.

(Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost*, Act 3 Scene 1)

*On my quest to learn more about learning,
to peer into the black box of the classroom
and piece together the why and how of education,
I fathomed that the momentum of knowledge
demands an inquisitive disposition,
a willingness to keep the eyes open,
a fixation with the prismatic nature of questions,
and a compulsion to reimagine all we do
in these shored up spaces
where the magic supposedly happens.*

- Daniel Xerri

This poem is a succinct reflection on educational research. One of the first things I learnt on my research journey as a doctoral student was that in order to hone my understanding of the teaching and learning of poetry I had to position myself as a curious observer of the processes that teachers and students engage in as part of their negotiation of poetic texts, including ones by Shakespeare. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, Moth tells Adriano that his knowledge about how to woo women with song was purchased by means of a small amount of observation. Like Moth, I discovered that knowledge about my area of interest was best acquired by means of those proclivities associated with the act of observing the world. My PhD was meant to build my expertise about a complex set of interactions in the poetry classroom, but unless I had developed the inclination to engage in observation and inquiry it was unlikely that I would have succeeded.

Daniel Xerri



F O R E W O R D

DANIEL XERRI

This Special Supplement on supporting teacher research through the development of research literacy is the first of two parts; the second part appears in the Spring 2018.

One popular definition of teacher research conceives it as research that classroom practitioners conduct in a systematic fashion in their own context with the purpose of forming a better understanding of their practices (Borg, 2013). Teacher research is acknowledged as a significant avenue for professional development, and a means of enhancing language learning and teaching (Xerri, 2017). However, as indicated by Burns (2010), such research is sometimes considered suspect because teachers might not possess the necessary knowledge and skills to do good quality research.

As suggested by the contributors to these two Special Supplements, the solution is not to disregard teacher research and focus exclusively on the research produced by academics and professional researchers. The research literacy of English language teachers needs to be adequately developed so that they can capitalise on the knowledge, skills, and beliefs required to do research (Borg, 2003).

The contributors to these Special Supplements are among some of the foremost experts on teacher research worldwide. The participation of teacher educators, teacher association leaders, and academics working in a wide range of international contexts ensures that the two supplements act as a showcase of influential views about the kind of support that teachers need for them to develop the necessary research literacy to engage in research and share their findings in an effective manner.

It is hoped that by reading the various contributions to these two Special Supplements, readers can appreciate the value of supporting teacher-researchers through the development of research literacy. Classroom practitioners might want to seek ways of nurturing their capacity to do research in their own contexts, while teacher educators might want to evaluate what gaps they can bridge in order for teachers to position themselves as teacher-researchers. School leaders might want to evaluate whether their institutions' professional culture and the



working conditions that teachers are subjected to encourage such positioning or otherwise. Teacher associations like ETAS might want to take stock of the crucial role they can play in enabling teachers to develop a satisfactory level of research literacy, engage in good quality research, and disseminate the findings of their research as broadly as possible.

Special Supplement 1

The first Supplement consists of seven articles and two interviews. Most of the contributors seem to concur that the notion of research applicable to classroom practitioners might need to be broader than that underpinning academic research. For instance, Thomas S. C. Farrell underscores this idea when he suggests that teachers would benefit far more from being trained to engage in evidence-based reflective practice. David Nunan engages with the question of how to define the research conducted by teachers and what forms it may take. He considers the different kinds of data that teachers may gather and some of the approaches they may adopt, including action research.

Going beyond the parameters that typically define academic research, Mark Wyatt assesses how teacher-researchers can be mentored to produce good quality research through reflection stimulated by three key questions. Achilleas Kostoulas argues why it might be better for teachers to hone their research literacy rather than dismiss 'research' as a purely academic endeavour that has no bearing on their professional lives and practices. He maintains that research literacy enables teachers to engage with the academic literature and prepares them for conducting classroom-based inquiry.

Despite advancing various forms of support for teacher research literacy in their respective articles, contributors to this supplement are nevertheless in agreement about the value of teacher research. For example, Gary Barkhuizen discusses the potential of narrative inquiry as a means of understanding teachers' and learners' experiences in the language classroom. Narrative inquiry enables teachers to reflect on and interpret their professional practices within a specific context, and this can lead to change. Hanna Brookie and Cynthia White illustrate how reflection encouraged a teacher to engage in enquiry through a

systematic research process. This enquiry was beneficial not only for the teacher-researcher but also for the research participants and the wider professional community.

Teacher research literacy can be fostered in a variety of ways, including through the support provided by teacher educators, educational managers, and teacher associations. Darío Luis Banegas describes how pre-service teacher education programmes in Argentina has helped promote research literacy despite the top-down nature of its implementation. Some of the benefits of such implementation, for instance, include added emphasis on collaboration and reflection, which have broader implications beyond the programme's local context. Anne Burns discusses ten tips that are meant to guide educational managers in their efforts to support teacher research. Through these ten tips she highlights the important role that managers play in enabling teachers not just to embrace an approach like action research, but to engage in it.

Finally, Christine Coombe discusses some of the ways in which teacher associations can support teacher-researchers to develop the knowledge and skills required to do research and promote it amongst their peers.

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Daniel Xerri is a Lecturer in TESOL at the University of Malta, the Joint Coordinator of the IATEFL Research SIG, and the Chairperson of the ELT Council within the Ministry for Education and Employment in Malta. He holds postgraduate degrees in English and Applied Linguistics, as well as a PhD in Education from the University of York. He has been awarded a number of international grants in order to conduct research in the United Kingdom, Australia, and the USA. He is the author of many publications on different areas of education and TESOL, including articles published in *ELT Journal*, *English in Education*, and *International Journal of Research and Method in Education*. His main research interests are creativity and teacher education. Further details about his talks and publications can be found at: www.danielxerri.com

daniel.xerri@um.edu.mt