reasons (insecurity, forgetting to photograph their board or feeling they don't have anything to contribute), but will still take something away.

• It will need a leader. Somebody will need to take responsibility for the group, at least in the early stages. A lack of participation is not a problem in terms of learning, but it is a problem if nobody posts anything. Over time it may become more autonomous. It's possible to have a bank of whiteboards and tasks to post at regular intervals to make administration easier.

• Some posts generate more discussion than others. Tasks related to language work well, as do posts that demonstrate specific activities. If tasks are too long or complicated, teachers can find them a little intimidating and do not know how to begin answering. When teachers are encouraged to find examples of whiteboards online, they seem more willing to share and discuss them.

• Facebook is an effective platform for this type of project. Group posts allow nested comments meaning that teachers can post images below the parent post and each post then can have its own comment thread. It is also widely used and easy to access on mobile.

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10.7 Developing teachers' conceptions of research

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What is research?

Despite being most often associated with academia, research is a valuable enterprise for classroom practitioners. It is both a means by which they can grow as professionals and improve learning and teaching. However, teachers are bound to feel alienated from research if they conceive of it as an activity that exclusively belongs to the academic domain. This alienation is inimical to language education given that teachers are at the chalkface. Their knowledge of the subject, context and learners most probably makes them ideally placed to develop insider insights into what happens in the black box of the classroom and the reasons for these events. The impact of these insights risks being blunted by a narrow understanding of research foisted upon teachers by the academic community that studies the classroom from an outside perspective.

Limited conceptions of research might lead some teachers to think of it as something necessarily involving a hypothesis, statistics or in-depth analysis. However, in essence, research is the process of asking a question about something you are interested in or puzzled by, and then finding an answer to that question. This view is shared by Christine Coombe, who says that 'research is basically finding out something that I either have an interest in and I didn't know about before, or just learning something new about my students' (as cited in Xerri 2017a: 36). What this implies is that research is a democratic and inclusive activity that belongs to all those teachers who are curious about language education and the events in their classrooms. However, if teachers wish to engage *with* and *in* research, they might require support with their conceptualisation of research.

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Teacher research engagement

There are two dimensions to teacher research engagement. The first one involves teachers reading published research or listening to research talks at a conference. The other aspect involves teachers doing research in their own classrooms. Both forms of research engagement are beneficial to teachers and can have an impact on learning and teaching. Both of them entail a level of research literacy that enables teachers to harness research as effectively as possible. On the one hand, it is important for teachers to be able to critically engage with the research produced by other professionals and to explore whether it resonates with their own context and learners' needs. On the other hand, teachers need to possess the technical competence to find answers to the questions they might have about their teaching and learners. Related to this, and perhaps even more important, is the idea that teachers need to have broad conceptions of research that allow them to see themselves as professionals who are capable and eligible to do research.

Inclusive conceptions of research have the potential to boost teachers' confidence as teacher-researchers and lead them to think of research as an intrinsic part of their professional identity. In fact, Kathleen Graves laments the fact that most often 'Teacher and researcher are not seen as part of the same identity … Teachers may see research as separate from them … Understanding that research is a possible part of your identity as a teacher is important' (as cited in Xerri 2018: 38). Once research is thought of as something forming part of their professional identity, teachers are much more likely to exploit the benefits of research engagement.

Facilitating research engagement

The need to broaden teachers' way of thinking about research and their relationship with research is deemed to be so crucial that Dudley Reynolds considers it to be one of the main challenges to teacher research engagement. He maintains that 'the main obstacle is simply the understanding of what research is. It's an understanding that can disempower the teacher; it makes them feel deficient and dependent on the outside expert. So, the first step is really to begin to change that understanding of what research is and how it fits into practice' (as cited in Xerri 2017b: 12). This idea implies that supporting teachers should go beyond merely equipping them with the knowledge and skills to read and do research. The most fundamental form of support consists of empowering them to see themselves as professionals who already engage in practices that run parallel to research as an activity. By developing their beliefs about research and themselves as research engaged professionals, teachers are encouraged to explore the questions they have about teaching and learning. In essence, teachers come to feel that they can and have a right to answer their questions.

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