
Language Teacher Research Series

Review by Melanie McKinney

Farrell, T. S. C. (Ed.). *Language Teacher Research in Asia*. In T. S. C. Thomas (Series Ed.), *Language Teacher Research Series*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL. Pp. 208. \$29.95 (member \$22.45). ISBN 193-118516-6.

Borg, S. (Ed.). *Language Teacher Research in Europe*. In T. S. C. Thomas (Series Ed.), *Language Teacher Research in Europe*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL. Pp. 206. \$29.95 (member \$22.95). ISBN: 978-193118537-0.

McGarrell, H. (Ed.). *Language Teacher Research in the Americas*. In T. S. C. Thomas (Series Ed.), *Language Teacher Research in the Americas*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL. Pp. 203. \$29.95 (member 22.95). ISBN: 978-1931185-42-4.

Coombe, C., & Barlow, L. (Eds.). *Language Teacher Research in the Middle East*. In T. S. C. Thomas (Series Ed.), *Language Teacher Research in the Middle East*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL. Pp. 208. \$29.95 (member \$22.95). ISBN: 978-1-931185-41-7.

Burton, J., & Burns, A. (Eds.). (in press). *Language Teacher Research in Australia and New Zealand*. In T. S. C. Thomas (Series Ed.), *Language Teacher Research Series*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Language Teacher Research in Africa. (In press). In T. S. C. Thomas (Series Ed.), Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Research is one of the five organizational goals of TESOL Inc.'s *Forward Plan* (a document finalized in 1998 containing the organization's mission statement, values, goals, and objectives). In a president's address issued August/September 1998 in TESOL Matters, Kathleen C. Bailey (1998-99 TESOL President) publicly announced the TESOL *Forward Plan* and stated,

Different leaders expressed the view that we must take TESOL research out of the exclusive confines of university departments and make it tangible to classroom teachers. . . . Another idea was that TESOL should establish a clear mechanism by which quality action research done by non-university members would be officially recognized at the convention and in publications.

With the explosion of discourse in the field on teacher learning and development, reflective teaching/practice, evidence-based practice (EBP), and research, *The Language Teacher Research Series* seems to have emerged with intentional timing to help achieve TESOL's research goals and objectives.

This series has a volume representing every continent (minus Antarctica). The series editor, Tom Farrell, is also the editor of the first volume, *Language Teacher Research in Asia*. This book, as do all in the series, contains thirteen articles researching a variety of topics, submitted by a range of teachers (Pre- K-12 grades, private language institutions, university, and teacher educators/trainers). The chapters are listed alphabetically according to the author's family name and follow a standard pattern of headings: Issue, Background Literature, Procedures, Results, and Reflection. Although the definition and method of teacher research is debated, the series and volume editors are in agreement that these books are designed to help language teachers at all levels engage in classroom reflection and research in order to cultivate professional development and increase the quality and effectiveness of teacher teaching and student learning. It is also their hope that despite the varied contexts and cultures, readers will be inspired to duplicate, or ultimately conduct their own teacher research, and share it with others.

Farrell, in Chapter One of *Language Teacher Research in Asia*, tells of a survey conducted in 2005 by Doan Thi Kim Khanh and Nguyen Thi Hoai An among 202 Vietnamese English teachers. Among those surveyed, "60% responded that they had conducted some research. Of those who had conducted research, 53% reported that they had undertaken research only once and that in many of those cases it was a requirement of an advanced degree" (p. 2).

The top three problems listed by these teachers in doing research were

1. Lack of time (31%)
2. Lack of experience (31%)
3. Lack of theoretical knowledge (26%)

These responses are not inclusive to any region, but are quite universal in nature. In his book, *Doing Teacher Research: From Inquiry to Understanding*, Donald Freeman shares his experience as a new language teacher.

My first five years or so of teaching were pretty much consumed with getting the job done. Gradually, though, I gained a sense of balance and control, of efficiency in what I was doing in the classroom; I began to feel that I knew what I was doing and how to do it. Because I now felt that I had the basics under control, I became less concerned with getting the job done and more interested in how I was teaching" (p. 1).

Even after a teacher has taught for years, time is still a factor as to why research is not conducted. How to allot limited time for research depends on the teacher's determination and motivation. Though this series cannot create more time for teachers,

it may increase motivation for research by showing the methods of how it can be done, and the results, thereby stimulating curiosity and reflection of practices in one's own classroom. It also demonstrates that teachers from all educational institutions, particularly non-university, can in fact conduct and publish research.

The topics of research are not categorized according to continents; rather, teachers in these separate regions researched localized issues they themselves wanted to investigate according to their classrooms and situations. Thus, articles appearing in the volume on Europe could be just as valuable to teachers in Asia. In other words, research topics presented in each area are applicable for ESOL teachers across the globe.

This series could further help teachers lacking in research experience were it to provide a glossary of terms for each volume. The majority of language teachers in EFL environments are non native English speakers. A large majority of these teachers are also novices to research and to TESOL jargon. As a native English-speaker and someone familiar with TESOL research, I had to reread some articles several times in order to fully understand what the procedures and findings were. I came across vocabulary and terms I had never seen before, and felt that if it was confusing for me to read, it would certainly be difficult for non native English speakers unfamiliar with TESOL terminology and research methods to comprehend. Some articles are definitely more reader-friendly than others. Consequently, I feel a glossary of terms would benefit the target audience, and help save time in reading and understanding the featured research. It would be simple to include, and I hope it will be considered for the second volume.

For all of the effort put into creating this series and collecting submissions for each region-specific volume, I am amazed at how limited the availability is for these books. All TESOL published books are bought almost entirely direct from TESOL either through mail, phone, or online, and are rarely available in and through outside sources and bookstores. This is true for the *Language Teacher Research Series*. It is highly unlikely that a language teacher would come across one of these books in a bookstore (specialty or general). Subsequently, unless teachers in Africa, the Middle East, and other volume areas know about TESOL, Inc. and this series, have access to the internet, a credit card/check, and know how to order these books, distribution is extremely limited. This series acclaims the convenience of having one book containing several examples of teacher research from one specific area of the world. This is true, but the books will benefit only a select few unless distribution is increased and access to buying them is mainstreamed.

The *Language Teacher Research Series* is ambitious and represents every populated area in the world. The *Asia*, *Europe*, *The Americas*, and *The Middle East* volumes are all currently available for purchase online at the TESOL, Inc. website. The

Australia and New Zealand (which I feel should more appropriately be termed *Oceania* in order to include the other nations in this geographical area) and *Africa* volumes are forthcoming. I look forward to future volumes and articles representing countries not yet featured, and particularly to increased distribution, and a glossary.

References

Freeman, D. (1998). *Doing teacher research: From inquiry to understanding*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

About the Reviewer

Melanie McKinney holds a BA in TESOL from Brigham Young University-Hawai'i, and an MA in Asian Studies from the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. She has taught throughout East Asia, and most recently as an EIL lecturer at BYU-Hawai'i.

Conference Announcements

Purdue University. June 5-7, 2008. The Seventh Symposium on Second Language Writing, "Foreign Language Writing Instruction: Principles and Practices." Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana. E-mail tony@purdue.edu. Web site <http://www.sslw2008.org/>

FEELTA/NATE. June 26-28, 2008. "Building Bridges with Languages and Cultures," Far Eastern National University, Vladivostok, Russia. E-mail feeltacon@dvgu.ru. Web site <http://feelta.wl.dvgu.ru/upcoming.htm>

ACTA. July 10-12, 2008. "Pedagogies of Connection," Alice Springs Convention Centre, Alice Springs, Northern Territory, Australia. E-mail events@apapdc.edu.au. Web site <http://www.tesol.org.au/conference/>

A TESOL Symposium on Keeping Language Diversity Alive. July 9, 2008. TESOL's Symposium on Keeping Language Diversity Alive, Alice Springs, Northern Territory, Australia. Web site http://www.tesol.org/s_tesol/seccss.asp?CID+250&DID-1722

A TESOL Symposium on Learner Autonomy: What Does the Future Hold? November 8, 2008. A TESOL Symposium on Learner Autonomy: What Does the Future Hold? Sevilla, Spain. Web site http://www.tesol.org/s_tesol/seccss.asp?CID=250&DID=1722