

INTRODUCTION

When language teachers are acquainted with the findings of cutting-edge research in the field of second or foreign language acquisition, many of them just shrug their shoulders or simply ignore them with a wave of a hand, apparently thinking there is nothing researchers can tell them about effective teaching practice that they would not already know themselves. By the same token, there are far too many scholars who refuse to take seriously the findings of the research projects that practitioners conduct in their own classrooms, pointing to insufficient scientific rigor, lack of generalizability, failure to employ adequate statistical tools and many other flaws. While such sentiments are indicative of the somewhat inevitable rift between theory and research, on the one hand, and the actual act of teaching, on the other, they also point to the pressing need to bring the worlds of researchers and practitioners closer together. This is precisely the goal that IATEFL Research Special Interest Group has been vigorously pursuing for many years and, among the numerous activities it engages in, it is undoubtedly its annual conference devoted to different aspects of research into English language learning and teaching that serves this purpose particularly admirably. In October 2007 the event was held in Poland, being organized by the Department of Modern Languages of the State School of Higher Professional Education in Konin in cooperation with the English Department of the Faculty of Pedagogy and Fine Arts of Adam Mickiewicz University in Kalisz. Its theme was *Exploring English Language Learning and Teaching*, it attracted almost 70 researchers and practitioners from across the world, and provided a forum for almost 40 presentations reporting the findings of various empirical investigations.

The present volume contains a selection of 28 papers delivered during the conference, with its diversity and scope testifying to the complexity, potential and robustness of research studies addressing different aspects of learning and teaching English as a foreign and second language. Even a cursory look at the contributions included in the publication will show that the authors chose to address a variety of issues, many of which are of immediate relevance to practitioners, embrace quite diverse research methodologies, employ a whole gamut of data collection instruments and use sometimes quite disparate analytical tools. Valuable as such diversity is in demonstrating the multifaceted nature of the field as well as highlighting the need to adjust research procedures to the object of investigation, it also posed a formidable challenge to the editor whose first task was to divide the contents in such a way that the book would be coherent, self-contained and easy to use. In the end, following much deliberation, hesitation and consultation, with the invaluable help from the reviewer, a decision was made to divide the volume into five parts, each containing articles with a similar focus, arranged according to their theme rather than the names of the contributors.

Part I, entitled *Teachers as researchers and learners*, brings together four papers by Richard Kiely, Danuta Gabryś-Barker, Anne Margaret Smith and Meg Cas-samally, all of which deal with different aspects of teacher professional de-velopment. Part II, *Teaching and learning language forms*, the longest in the col-lection, contains nine articles seeking to determine the ways in which teach-ers as well as learners can make the acquisition of grammatical, lexical and phonological elements more effective, with contributions by Jan Majer, Alan Fortune, Mirosław Pawlak, Susan Griffiths and Zhou Chunhong, Anna Mystkowska-Wiertelak, Agnieszka Pietrzykowska, Mahmood Mehrabi, Mar-ta Rominiecka and Magdalena Wrembel. Part III, in turn, entitled *Issues in teaching language skills*, shifts the focus to the skills of reading, writing and translation, and includes six contributions by Bogusława Whyatt, Magdalena Trepczyńska, Abbas Eslami Rasekh, M. Naci Kayaoğlu, Ali Şükrü Özbay and M. Naci Kayaoğlu, and Siân Morgan. In Part IV, *Learner factors*, the reader will find four articles by Martine Derivry-Plard, Gülşen Musayeva Vefali, Mehmet Kiliç and Berrin Uçkun, and Noreen Caplan-Spence, all of which adopt a learner-centered perspective, seeking to examine the impact of beliefs, motivation, anxiety and learning disorders on the process of lan-guage learning. Finally, Part V, entitled *Syllabuses, resources and examinations*, features five articles concerning the organization and evaluation of the learn-ing process, contributed by Melanie Ellis, Marek Derenowski, Berrin Uçkun and Sevgin Ersürmeli, Bartosz Wolski and Dawn Perkins.

In conclusion to this introduction, it is only fitting to acknowledge the assistance and dedication of all of those without whom the volume would not have taken its present shape and the IATEFL Research SIG event would not have turned out to be such a success. First and foremost, my thanks go to all the conference presenters and then contributors to this edited collection who were at pains to adhere to all the deadlines and submission guidelines, and re-sponded promptly to all my requests for adjustments and modifications. I am truly indebted to the reviewer, Professor Hanna Komorowska, without whose profound experience, remarkable expertise and useful suggestions it would have been exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to attain the degree of clarity and coherence the volume now has. I am no less grateful to my friends and col-leagues in the English Department of the Faculty of Pedagogy and Fine Arts of Adam Mickiewicz University in Kalisz who volunteered to proofread the final version of the book before it went to the printer's, detecting many of the spel-ling errors, technical problems and other inaccuracies that had escaped my at-tention. There are also those who assisted me in the organization of the event and, here, my first debt of gratitude is to Doctor Simon Borg, the coordinator of IATEFL Research SIG who trusted in our ability to hold a successful con-ference, aided me with all the technicalities and spared no effort to help me re-view speaker proposals and draw up the final program. The conference surely could not have taken place without the wholehearted support of my colleagues from the Department of Modern Languages of the State School of Higher

Professional Education in Konin who saw to it that everything went exactly according to plan. I am also grateful to the students of English who invested their time and energy in organizing the event and did their utmost to assist the participants from abroad whatever the problem they might have encountered. It is my genuine belief that the conference was an enriching experience for both its organizers and participants, and that this volume will have a role in bridging the gap between research and pedagogy, and that it will contribute to enhancing the quality of second and foreign language education.

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