

Review of *Stories of Mentoring Teacher-Research*, edited by Richard Smith, Seden Eraldemir Tuyan, Mariana Serra, and Erzsébet Ágnes Békés (2024). IATEFL Research Special Interest Group in association with MenTRnet, 150pp. ISBN: 978-1-912588-50-3 (eBook).
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1. Introduction

Stories of Mentoring Teacher-Research is a timely and vital contribution to the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) and teacher education. This edited volume, the first publication from the Mentoring Teacher-Research Network called MenTRnet (<https://www.mentrnet.net>) offers 20 reflective narratives from mentors around the world. The stories in this book illustrate how teacher-led research can flourish even in settings that are under-resourced, affected by conflict, or geographically remote—provided there is thoughtful and supportive mentoring. A central focus of the book is Exploratory Action Research (EAR), a participatory method that enables teachers to investigate and improve their teaching practices through reflective inquiry. The uniqueness of the book is the result of its narrative style. Instead of offering a single approach to mentoring, it shares a variety of real-life stories, focusing on the different situations and shared challenges that teacher-researchers face across the world.

2. Structure and Content

The book offers unique first-hand experiences of mentors across a variety of challenging contexts from all over the world through 20 chapters arranged in a way that highlights the diversity of experiences, difficulties, needs and expectations from war-torn Iraq to large-scale mentoring initiatives in Africa and even the demanding times during the COVID-19 outbreak. A display of a distinctive mentoring approach is shown in each chapter while making it clear that various challenges are faced by mentors and mentees alike. It also highlights how mentoring contributed to the professional growth of teachers. In the introduction, the editors begin by explaining why mentoring matters and describe how MenTRnet was created as a global support network for educators. A strong focus is placed on Exploratory Action

Research (EAR), a methodology that encourages teachers to reflect on and analyze their classroom practices in a systematic order. The editors trace the development of EAR from its roots in British Council-supported initiatives to its recognition and application across the globe, establishing it as a central element within the mentoring model explored throughout the book.

3. Key Themes and Strengths

The book explores several important themes. One key theme is the value of mentoring in difficult situations. Many contributors share powerful stories from places affected by conflict, poverty, or long-standing problems in the education system. In these cases, mentoring offers more than just helping teaching—it becomes a way to build strength and support teachers in growing professionally. Another important theme is the need for mentoring to be long-lasting. Instead of short, one-time efforts, the contributors show how networks such as MenTRnet have helped teachers stay connected, work together, and continue learning even after the official projects have ended. The book also highlights the importance of teacher independence and reflective thinking. Many chapters show how mentoring can help teachers move from simply following instructions to becoming active changemakers in their classrooms and communities. Reflection is shown not just as a personal habit, but as something that grows through conversations between mentors and mentees. The book shares an important insight into mentoring as a two-way relationship where both parties can grow and learn together. It offers a glimpse into how teachers support one another through mutual respect, trust, and a shared desire to improve and learn.

4. Relevance to the field of ELT

This book is especially useful for ELT professionals, as many of the stories are about teachers working in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) or ESL (English as a Second Language) settings. Its focus on EAR is suitable with current ELT approaches that support reflective teaching and using evidence to improve practice (Smith, 2020). It also supports the expansive trend of empowering teachers in ELT, such as the British Council's Champion Teachers programme (British Council, 2016) by showcasing how mentoring helps teachers take charge of their professional growth. The book reinforces the idea that teachers themselves should lead professional growth rather than top-down training.

5. Chapter Highlights

Mentoring changes in different situations. The variations are from the environment, the people, the circumstances faced and so on.

What struck me the most while reading *Stories of Mentoring Teacher-Research* was how mentors adapted to their difficult environment and worked their way through. Still, they stayed grounded in patience, care, and a real commitment to supporting growth.

One story that stays with me was Mayamin Altae's (Chapter 1) experience of mentoring teachers in Iraq during the conflict. Picture trying to guide research when the internet keeps cutting out and power is unreliable. That in itself is hard to imagine, but what resonated with me was the emotional support she gave. Just showing up, staying steady, and being there for the teachers when everything around them was falling apart felt just as important, maybe even more than any kind of academic advice. It made me realize that in tough times, what people often need most from a mentor is not solutions, but a calm, steady presence that says, "You're not alone in this."

Then in India, Suchita Mahorkar (Chapter 3) mentored a group of primary teachers who were quick to find answers without fully understanding the problems. I've experienced that myself because when there's pressure to act fast, we tend to overlook the deeper questions. What I appreciated about Mahorkar's approach was how she encouraged her mentees to pause and really think things through. Instead of rushing to find quick answers, she guided them to take a step back and ask better questions. It made me reflect on how effective mentoring isn't about solving problems right away, it's about creating space for reflection and helping others see their path more clearly.

Ravinarayan Chakrakodi's chapter (4) gave a clear example of how mentoring can turn reflection into action. He didn't just help teachers see the problems, they worked together, step by step, to find practical ways to solve them. What I liked most was his calm and supportive approach. It made the process feel achievable and encouraging. He stayed involved, providing them with a clear path instead of leaving them to figure things out on their own. It showed me that good mentoring creates space to think and also helps you take the next step.

In Chapter 7, Meifang Zhuo explored something a bit different namely, how to keep teachers motivated over a long period. She worked with them for a full year while focusing on being steady and responsive. Rather than always trying something new, she paid attention to what her mentees needed at the time. It made me realize that trust in mentoring grows through small, consistent efforts and not by big gestures but simply by being there when it matters.

Empowerment came through strongly in Vinayadhar Raju's (Chapter 8) story. His goal was to help teachers take ownership of their growth. He used collaborative tools and provided them with the space to lead their learning. What I saw in his work was a shift from directing someone to walking alongside them. It was mentoring based on equality, not hierarchy.

The emotional side of mentoring returned in Vanita Chopra and Gyanu Daha's chapter (9). They described how small, informal conversations helped bring disengaged teachers back into the process. It reminded me of Altae's story, but in a completely different context. Still, the message was the same: real connection matters.

Ruben Mazzei and Mariana Serra (Chapter 11) from Argentina introduced the idea of using a shared journal. They used a shared journal with their mentees, writing together not just about what was happening, but also about how they felt. That kind of honest, reflective writing helped build a deeper, more personal connection between them.

Fauzia Shamim and Richard Smith (16) worked with teachers from Pakistan, who were hesitant to explore new methods. They helped them by supporting solid steps instead of quick change. A difference was truly seen because of their calm and respectful approach to the matter.

The last chapter by Erzsébet Ágnes Békés (Chapter 20) focused on helping teachers write and publish their research. What made it a special one was how she helped them to understand the value of their experiences. She didn't just alter their writing but also helped them understand their value and voices and how their stories mattered.

6. Conclusion

Stories of Mentoring Teacher-Research is an inspiring, practitioner-oriented book that brings mentoring to life through real-world stories of challenge and transformation. By weaving together experiences from across continents—often in difficult or marginalized contexts—it affirms the power of inquiry, reflection, and community in teacher development. The book's focus on working with peers, teacher independence, and support that fits different teaching circumstances makes it especially useful for the ELT (English Language Teaching) field. The book offers inspiration and useful advice for mentors, policymakers, teacher educators, and others who support teacher research.

While it could be improved with a clearer structure and more input from mentees, it succeeds in its main goal—to show the rich, challenging, and hopeful world of mentoring in teacher-research. It is both a celebration of this work and a call to action for more mentoring, honest reflection, and meaningful stories that recognize teachers as researchers and leaders of change.

References

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About the author

Renu Dhotre is the Academic Head and an experienced specialist in English Language Teaching (ELT) with over a decade of leadership in curriculum development, teacher mentoring, and capacity-building. She has mentored educators across India through the ARMS APTIS action-research mentorship program, guiding reflective classroom inquiry and professional development. She has also supported teachers in Maharashtra under the ELISS program—a partnership between the British Council and the state government—focusing on student-centered pedagogy and in-service teacher development. In her role as Joint Secretary of AINET, Renu has organized and delivered professional development workshops that have impacted teachers across the state. She is currently pursuing an MA in Applied Linguistics and TESOL and her publications include book reviews and articles in applied linguistics, teacher education, and reflective practice. Her interests lie in Exploratory Action Research, sustainable teacher development, and empowering teachers through research-informed practice.