Book Review: Stories of Mentoring Teacher-Research Edited by Richard Smith, Seden Eraldemir Tuyan, Mariana Serra, and Erzsébet Ágnes Békés (2024, IATEFL Research SIG/MenTRnet)

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In the growing field of teacher-research, "Stories of Mentoring Teacher-Research" (Smith et al., 2024) breaks new ground by shifting the focus from conducting research to mentoring it. This timely 2024 collection of mentoring narratives, edited by Richard Smith and colleagues, presents twenty vivid accounts from mentors guiding exploratory action research (EAR) in diverse contexts – ranging from challenging socio-political environments to formal teacher training settings in different parts of the world. What sets this collection apart is its raw, narrative approach that immerses readers in the emotional and logistical realities of mentoring in challenging contexts. Through these stories, we witness the delicate process of building trust with hesitant teachers, adapting research methods to local constraints, and mentoring large groups of teachers at the same time. As one of the first publications to center the mentor's role in teacher-research, it makes an invaluable contribution to the literature on professional development in language teacher

education, particularly for educators working in under-resourced or politically complex contexts.

The book thoughtfully arranges its twenty chapters into three cohesive parts that follow a meaningful progression, beginning with post-conflict Iraq to Chinese universities and global teacher development programs. These chapters highlight the challenges, insights, and growth that emerge through mentoring teacher-research. Mayamin Altae's opening chapter about Iraq stands out, showing how exploratory action research (EAR) served dual purposes – helping teachers work through personal trauma while simultaneously improving their teaching methods. Another interesting issue is raised in chapter 3. Within this chapter, Suchita Mahorkar offers a thoughtful and practical account of how she developed better questioning techniques through both literature and peer support. Drawing on key EAR handbooks and online mentor group discussions, the author identifies specific, actionable strategies that are grounded in empathy and clarity. Her personal belief – emphasizing simplicity, preparation, wait time, and respectful listening – demonstrates a deep awareness of the teachers' linguistic and emotional needs. It is a useful and practical model for mentors working in different contexts.

Chapters 8 to 14 mark a shift in focus, exploring how the authors manage larger-scale initiatives, such as coordinating projects or mentoring extensive groups of mentees. In chapter 10, one particularly compelling case study comes from Cameroon, where a single mentor Eric Ekembe successfully guided over 70 mentees, highlighting both the challenges and strategies involved in large-group mentoring through a context-responsive approach. By dividing participants into smaller teams with designated leaders and adopting flipped classroom strategies, the author fosters collaboration, autonomy, and sustainable learning. His experience shows that reducing central control and encouraging peer-led development can shift perceptions of teacher-research from a burden to a meaningful process. The reflection confirms the value of flexible and locally adapted mentoring models in local settings. Another notable example is from Argentina (chapter 11), where two mentors Ruben Mazzei and Mariana Serra introduced a practical tool – the mentoring journal – to support their mentees' professional growth. This section offers a rich account of how a shared Mentors' Journal fostered ongoing reflection, collaboration, and professional growth for both mentors. By making their mentoring dialogue visible to mentees, the co-mentors created a transparent, reflective space that encouraged deeper engagement. The experience highlights the dynamic nature of mentoring roles and how co-mentorship can offer fresh perspectives and strengthen internal mentors' practices. Most importantly, the use of collaborative reflection proved to be a powerful tool for

enhancing both mentor development and the overall research process within a learning community.

The final part (Chapters 15–20) emphasizes the importance of building supportive communities among mentors. It showcases established networks like MenTRnet that provide ongoing professional support and knowledge sharing. Chapter 16 recounts the co-mentoring experience of Fauzia Shamim and Richard Smith with teacher educators in Pakistan, highlighting the challenges and learning involved in shifting their academic views of research toward more practice-oriented exploratory action research. This chapter offers valuable insights into the unique challenges of mentoring teacher educators who hold traditionally academic conceptions of research. The authors reflect thoughtfully on the importance of trust, patience, and tailored mentoring strategies to help participants see the relevance and value of EAR in their own contexts. Their experience emphasizes that meaningful professional development in higher education requires not only resources and structure, but also a deep understanding of participants' existing beliefs and identities. Chapter 19 explores how layered digital mentoring and feedback tools supported teacher-researchers in writing up their research, highlighting how technology enabled focused, emotional, linguistic, and pedagogical support. Teachers received guidance from both an immediate mentor and a writing mentor, which helped maintain focus and reduce anxiety throughout the process. The author, Sidney Martin, provides a practical and heartfelt account of how tools like shared documents and WhatsApp facilitated dialogic feedback and built trust between mentors and mentees. This reflection offers valuable insights for educators aiming to create supportive, collaborative writing environments in both online and blended contexts.

Most importantly, I believe the book's greatest strength lies in its radical authenticity. Unlike polished academic treatises, these stories preserve the messy, emotional reality of mentoring such as the Uzbek mentor – Ella Maksakova who learned that expecting teacher-researchers to mentor independently from day one was unrealistic (chapter 12). This reflection thoughtfully highlights the need to build a stronger, ongoing community for local mentors to support their professional growth and recognition. It also emphasizes the potential benefits of co-mentoring and formal mentor training to enhance mentor confidence and effectiveness. The author's call for structured feedback from all participants shows a commitment to improving future projects through careful evaluation and responsiveness. Equally impressive, chapter 6 offers a raw and honest look at mentoring by sharing Chang Liu's real-life journey as a first-time mentor guiding teachers through research. It openly shows her struggles with self-doubt, cultural challenges, and fears about keeping her mentees motivated, while also celebrating their achievements, such as publishing articles and giving

presentations. The chapter avoids sugarcoating tough moments, for example, giving too much reading material or handling cultural pressures, to highlight how growth happens through messy, collaborative effort. By focusing on imperfect progress rather than perfection, it captures the true spirit of mentorship – learning and growing together through ups and downs. Significantly, the book amplifies voices often excluded from academic spaces – a standout feature illustrated by first-time contributors from regions ranging from Latin America to South Asia, which makes its message of empowerment through mentoring feel even more real.

Despite these strengths, the collection exhibits several limitations that future editions might address. First of all, although many authors acknowledge the difficulties of mentoring, the book tends to focus more on successes than on failures, risking a romanticized portrayal of mentoring. Secondly, since the book consists of multiple contributions from different authors, there is some inconsistency in writing style and depth of analysis. Some chapters are highly detailed and reflective, while others remain quite surface-level. Some narratives are too anecdotal and lack substantial analysis, making it difficult for readers to extract transferable lessons. While the book offers valuable insights, it lacks a clear concluding section that synthesizes key recommendations for mentors. To address this gap, readers may find it helpful to pair this collection of stories with (Smith, 2020), which offers concrete tools and specific guidelines for mentoring teacher-research in practice.

All in all, Stories of Mentoring Teacher-Research accomplishes what few academic works achieve: *it makes the mentoring experience visceral, urgent, and profoundly human*. Practitioners will find both comfort and challenge in its pages - comfort in seeing their struggles reflected and challenge in the creative solutions presented. While the book could improve by incorporating more critical reflections on failures and a structured mentoring guide, it remains an essential read for teacher educators, mentors, and anyone involved in supporting practitioner research. Different readers will extract different values from this work. Classroom teachers will find proof that research is possible in even the most challenging contexts. Mentors can adapt the case-study discussions for training workshops. This collection of stories stands as an important milestone in teacher-research literature - one that both celebrates progress made and acknowledges roads left untraveled. Its greatest legacy may be inspiring the next generation of teacher-research mentors to document their mentoring journeys with equal honesty and insight.

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