

## **Introduction**

In 2017, the University of Oregon welcomed the first cohort to its Advanced Certification in ELT (ACE) program\*. Educators from more than 20 countries exchanged ideas, formulated teaching philosophies, analyzed and revised the courses they teach, developed skills in an area of specialty, and planned an action research project. We are tremendously proud of every teacher who found the motivation and the time to complete their certification and become ACE alumni.

In this volume, we are pleased to present eight articles reporting on action research projects completed by ACE alumni in 2017 and 2018. In action research, teachers use techniques such as surveys, observations, and document analysis to systematically collect information within their own teaching context. The process begins with reflection to identify problems or issues that affect the classroom. This kind of reflection is central to teaching, and so is the practice of reading or discussing these issues to identify possible solutions. In action research, teachers take the further step of planning for systematic data collection before, during, and/or after the implementation of their proposed solution. The collection and analysis of this data allows action researchers to move forward with greater confidence as they adopt their solution into regular classroom practice, or further refine their ideas for another round of research. It also allows action researchers to share their findings with other teachers in reports like the ones in this volume.

Teaching is fundamentally a reflective practice, and the authors in this volume demonstrated the value of reflection on teaching throughout their participation in the ACE courses. In these papers, the authors present research conducted on three continents, in educational contexts ranging from primary school to high school to technical institutes and universities. They explored problems that affect their classrooms and tried out interventions that

they had discussed with their cohort during ACE. To answer their research questions, the authors collected student surveys, performed interviews, observed students in class, invited colleagues to observe them, kept journals, gave pre- and post-tests, and analyzed students' written and spoken work. In the following paragraphs we will give a brief overview of the individual projects.

In the first article of this volume, Reina Ruiz looked into the value of the flipped-classroom model for training pre-service teachers in Venezuela. Through the data she collected, Reina was able to demonstrate that the use of a flipped-classroom model increased the students' in-class questioning skills and also corresponded with an overall heightened level of critical inquiry within the classroom.

Working with students in a technical institute in Egypt, Rasha Osman explored the integration of literature into the curriculum, and she specifically looked at the impact of short stories on the teaching and learning process. Rasha found that integrating short stories into the general English classroom enhanced both students' motivation to participate in the classes, and their overall critical thinking skills.

Luiz Carlos Pacheco studied his teenaged students' response to two types of innovative materials, popular songs, and authentic texts from the students' technical field of specialization. He collected information about students' subjective experience using a survey and interviews, and also noted higher average grades in the class where he used these innovative materials.

Geremew Garda Wozie wanted to know why so many students were dropping out of ESP courses for military and law enforcement personnel. He explored a variety of possible reasons via student surveys and teacher interviews, in an effort to determine what interventions might reduce the drop out rate.

Augustin Palenfo added an extra assignment for his high school students, asking them to read and present summaries of several short stories within one term. He analyzed their written work and oral summaries to report on students' ability to participate actively and autonomously. He also interviewed the students to learn how they felt about reading the stories, to look for changes in confidence and motivation.

In his action research project on the scaffolding necessary to help students effectively acquire knowledge of English punctuation, Muhammad Younas worked with his students in a government public school in Pakistan. Muhammad divided his students into both an experimental and control group, and increased scaffolding was provided during instruction for the experimental group. Data collected suggested that students in the experimental group acquired knowledge of punctuation more quickly and efficiently than students in the control group.

In Lebanon, Sandy and Zeinab Hassan experimented with the use of TED Talks to enhance listening comprehension and motivation in their military students. In student self-report data, participants suggested that the use of TED Talks in the classroom helped them with the overall retention of information. In general, the use of authentic videos in the classroom served to support student listening comprehension and enhance their motivation.

Mariana Ruiz Nascimento implemented listening journals with her ESP students in a university context. She let them individually select out-of-class listening practice, and report on their selections online. She used a survey to investigate students' response to the activity and examined whether they became more comfortable with listening comprehension, reducing resistance to these activities.

As the editors of this volume, we have been grateful for the opportunity to work with these educators, both during their ACE training and in the process of carrying out and writing up their action research projects. They are an inspiring group, as you will see when you read their work. Enjoy!

-Beth Sheppard and Andy Halvorsen

\*For more information about ACE, you can visit <https://aei.uoregon.edu/programs/teacher-training/ace>