
Book Review

RELC Journal

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DOI: 10.1177/0033688218771382

journals.sagepub.com/home/rel



Teaching in Low-Resource Classrooms: Voices of Experience by R. Smith, A. Padwad and D. Bullock (eds) (London: The British Council, 2017), 65pp. ISBN 978-0-86355-884-9, open access e-book. Available at: <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/teaching-low-resource-classrooms-voices-experience>. Associated videos are available at: <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/low-resource-classrooms>

Reviewed by: Kam See C. Fung, SEAMEO RELC, Singapore.

‘I felt like a soldier sent to the battlefield with no weapons or training’ (p.18). A lecturer in Nepal captured the feeling of many teachers in low-resource classrooms. How then shall we teach? *Teaching in Low-Resource Classrooms: Voices of Experience* provides some practical answers. It is a free downloadable e-book with associated videos created from the shared experiences of 34 teachers from Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan.

This e-book adopts a postmodern bottom up approach with an emphasis on stories, experiences, and community. The stories represent the genuine concerns of passionate and committed language teachers and educators who aspire to make a difference in their classrooms and the lives of their students. As a bank of practical ideas and an edited collection of stories, this e-book fills a gap in training materials for teachers working in similar situations. It also illustrates that sharing examples of successful teaching collaboratively has a particular value as a starting point for the teachers’ own further development and that teacher-inquiry is useful in developing appropriate methodology.

The e-book is divided into two main parts with a total of 25 chapters. The introduction provides clear steps for generating the stories of success and the small-scale research projects for stories of teacher-inquiry. There is an effort to involve readers with reflection questions. Part I is about 18 success stories. Each story is about 1–1½ pages long with two reflection questions to involve readers. A hyperlink is included to direct the reader to the associated video presentation if there is one. Part II is about seven stories of teacher-inquiry. The inquiry process is clearly spelt out, providing a replicable model for teachers who are interested in similar teacher-inquiry for methodology and approaches that would work in their circumstances. The resource materials are well-organized and easily accessible. For the busy reader, the following link to a video gives a brief overview of the e-book in three minutes, <http://www.viddler.com/v/1b1fcaeb>. The teachers are genuinely motivated to make a difference in the students’ lives. In their words, ‘I become the resource for them’.

In the face of huge challenges in low-resource classrooms, many teachers shared that patience and perseverance are the keys to success. A teacher's attitude makes a big difference in the learning outcome as reflected in the following, 'We need to think of our students as a resource rather than a nuisance' (p. 24). 'The teacher who can think and see the world through their eyes will love them and this love can help us become better teachers' (p. 24).

The stories do not limit themselves to the classrooms. One touching example is about a passionate teacher and the street children in Karachi, Pakistan. Creating a garage school for over 120 street children was her answer to the following requests by some street children, 'Will you send us to school? Will you teach us?' (p. 21). In her own words, 'it was a drop in the ocean. Nevertheless, even if I managed to put a drop in the ocean, I have achieved some success in my life' (p. 22).

The teacher inquiries in Part II provide contextually appropriate approaches on major issues and common concerns, which include seven topics. Readers can learn much from the collective wisdom expressed as it could enable them to be more effective and efficient despite all the constraints. For example, in 'Correcting Written Work in Large Classes', Qaiser and Karim offer practical suggestions for reducing and managing the daily workload including the following: check while the students are working, use peer checking, do a verbal check first, random check, check one group at a time, check different features depending on text type, and create a work plan to manage class work and homework. In 'Managing Multiple Classes in One Room without Partitions', Senchow, Gogoi, Hapila and Deuba introduce various strategies including using a mix of teacher-led, self-directed, multi-class, and whole-school activities. In 'Working with Differing Levels of Ability in an English Language Classroom', Rao, Dhaliwal and Mondegarian provide a useful bag of novel ideas. In Dhaliwal's words, 'As teachers, we have to come down from our high pedestal and look upon our learners' efforts in the same way a mother takes pride in the first unsteady steps of her toddler' (p. 57).

Although not from an ASEAN perspective, the initiatives and ideas in this e-book are relevant for teachers working in low-resource classrooms in the ASEAN region. Furthermore, teachers in less challenging situations may also be inspired by the passion and determination of these teachers in making a difference.

A drawback of the videos is that the accents of some teachers make them difficult to understand. Fortunately, subtitles can be turned on for a clearer understanding. Furthermore, it would have been beneficial to include some classroom demos in low-resource teaching contexts; however, this is understandable as the videos were created in a five-day Hornby Regional School in Kathmandu.

It is worth noting that there are many levels of leadership to tackle the challenges in low-resource classrooms. Readers can search the 'Global Education Monitoring Reports' in the UNESCO website, (<http://en.unesco.org/gem-report/>) for further reading. The narratives of seasoned teachers in this e-book are tools for transformation. I highly recommend this e-book to any interested teachers and educators for their leisure reading as it provides inspiration for professional development.