

Teacher Autonomy Development through Reading Teacher Research: Agency, Motivation and Identity

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Abstract

This study highlights the need to promote more personal and informal processes in Teacher Autonomy and focuses on university Language Teachers' processes in reading Teacher Research (TR) in order to understand how this impacts their autonomy development processes. In particular, it addresses teachers' interactions with TR articles during the reading process, and aims to gain insights into autonomy development from the teachers' reflection during the process. This study uses two well-known research tools, Think Aloud Protocol (TAP) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) for an innovative purpose: to fulfil both research and teacher education purposes, thus exemplifying a particular way to promote and investigate critical reading in teacher education. The analysis of the TAPs, and follow-up focus group discussions reveal the key theme of autonomy. Three autonomy-related sub-themes emerged: gaining agency, developing motivation and gaining awareness of a more democratic form of teacher development. 11 participants undertook a task that allowed a highly personalized interpretation of all aspects of the text. It is argued that conditions for autonomy development were created by offering freedom to choose and interpret a text that is comprehensible and relevant. Teachers were entirely free to interpret their texts, and responsible for their learning from it. Teachers interpreted the articles in a variety of ways, and differed according to their emphasis on the particular aspects: motivation, agency and identity. The study concludes that the task provided an opportunity for autonomy to emerge according to the developmental needs of the individual.

Key Words: learner autonomy, teacher education, teacher autonomy, practitioner research, think-aloud protocol

Introduction

There is an important distinction between the autonomy described by Holec (1985), who focused on individual-cognitive aspects, and Dam (1995), who emphasised social interaction aspects. The later version was radically different, involving the integration of learner agency, motivation and identity, and highlighting social aspects (Little 2013). In the current study, Learner autonomy, whether of language students, or of teachers as learners of teaching (Smith and Erdoğan, 2008), is considered in relation to these views. Thus, the learning of autonomy and the learning of languages are seen as two mutually supporting processes (Little, Dam and Leiberhausen, 2017). Similarly, the process of teachers' own efforts of learning to teach autonomously and learning to be autonomous in their own education are considered as part of the same process. The complexity of autonomy, and its relationships to agency, motivation and identity, are discussed by Huang (2011), who considers that agency may be a prerequisite for autonomy, and identity change, an outcome. In this study, it is suggested that these different autonomy-related aspects provide a valuable approach to assessing the impact of autonomy training, and are the basis for this study, which aims to

understand ways in which reading Teacher Research (TR) promotes autonomous teacher development. Therefore, the research questions are:

1. How do teachers interact with TR articles as readers during the reading process?
2. What are the emerging insights into autonomy development from the teachers' reflection over the reading process?

Teacher Autonomy in Teacher education

According to Manzano Vázquez (2016), there are three different interpretations of teacher autonomy related to *their teaching activity*, *their professional development activity*, and *the relationship of TA with learner autonomy (LA)*. We recognise that due to contextual constraints, teachers are not always able to be autonomous in the classroom, but, at the individual level, most will be in a position to create 'spaces for personal autonomy' (Benson 2010). Jimenez Raya and Vieira (2015) highlight that autonomy has two dimensions, willingness and ability. Therefore, in this study, autonomy is considered as a complex concept, in which separate personal and social-interactive elements interact in complex ways with affective and cognitive aspects. Clearly, the concept of TA is therefore more than a personal attitude; Jimenez Raya and Vieira (2018) describe it as a vision, and their 'pedagogy for autonomy' emphasizes political aspects, including the promotion of democratic ideals and a sense of collective advancement among teachers. Therefore, in this research, we highlight a wider need for teachers to be able to understand their potential as controllers of their own development, and not just as implementers of others' research and programmes. Thus, as well as cognitive and motivational benefits, teachers can be given the opportunity to gain a sense of being involved in a more democratic and inclusive PD process promoting 'interpersonal empowerment' (Jimenez Raya and Vieira 2015).

Teacher Research (TR) has been recommended as an empowering tool for promoting TA by ManzanoVázquez (2016) and Mello, Dutra and Jorge (2008) and successful language teacher development (Izumi 2009; Wang and Zhang 2014). TR is designed to promote reflection, but, despite claims made for reading TR, e.g. Borg (2013), as far as we are aware, the processes by which texts influence teacher beliefs or research intentions have not been investigated. To this end, in this study we used Think Aloud Protocols (TAP) to explore the reading process. After giving the task, the supervisor avoided further intervention, highlighting that autonomy depends on the learner taking the opportunity to move away from dependency (La Ganza 2008). Such texts have the potential to provide data-led reflection for professional development activities (Walsh and Mann 2015), but in this context, the development was realised through reflection on (a peer's) reflection, representing a potential deepening of the processes. Autonomy was granted through freedom of choice (Lamb and Reinders 2008), in this case, of an article for reflection from a collection of (mainly autonomy related) TR studies (Author 2016), and the complete freedom to interpret the article and task.

The role of reading in Teacher Education

Research reading, termed as engagement *with* research, has many benefits: helping teachers make sense of their work, providing a way to talk about their work, providing theoretical justification for actions, and leading to reflection on planning and decision making (Borg

2013: 81-82). However, Borg (2009) notes a range of factors preventing these benefits: Teachers may receive little or no encouragement, and even discouragement, and may not see it as part of their job, considering it unfeasible. Many teachers are unaware of research for practitioners, regarding it as for academics only. For reading to be effective in teacher education, three conditions are needed. First, teachers must be open to reading; teachers who access research are likely to be those who are open to change, see education in wider terms, see their work as having a clear purpose, and are interested in exploring their work (Leat, Reid, and Lofthouse 2015). Second, texts must be ‘physically, conceptually, linguistically and practically credible, useable and interesting’ (Borg 2013, 99). There are also factors that might make research appealing to teachers, including relevance to contexts and interests, building on teachers’ knowledge, being congruent with their beliefs, and making clear recommendations for changes in practice (Borg 2013, 82). Finally, teachers should be allowed the freedom to interpret texts in their own way. Teachers tend to interpret texts in a highly-personalized way (Rankin and Becker 2006), by selecting parts of interest, a process which may lead to appreciation, but also doubt and scepticism (Cain 2015).

TR as reading input for teachers

Formal research, as we argue, is the writing of professional academics contributing to academia, following certain conventions for conducting and writing up research. Teachers may express dissatisfaction with formal research, especially in their own informal professional development, due to its theoretical complexity, lack of practical relevance, and over-formal language (Borg 2013, 82). However, we recognise that formal and practitioner research have different purposes. As Jimenez Raya and Vieira (2015, 5) point out, academic research can help teachers form their own theory, but teacher education should be experienced-based, and not merely the enacting of researchers’ recommendations. Interest in TR grew with increasing emphasis on teacher and learner autonomy, as it promotes critical reflection, encourages awareness of issues that would otherwise be overlooked, increases openness to change, promotes self-criticism, and provides new insights into the possibilities for improvement (Burns 2009).

With its rather personal and idiosyncratic discourse (Bartels 2003, 744), TR has the advantage of being accessible in terms of content, language, and methodology (Gitlin, Barlow, Burbank, Kauchak, and Stevens 1999). Furthermore, reading TR for development has clear parallels to the case-based approach, recommended in Jimenez Raya and Vieira (2015), and Jimenez Raya (2011), in that both are designed to promote autonomous development through reflection on others’ teaching projects, allowing a critical approach to the questions problematized, issues discussed, and others’ perspectives.

Materials and Methods

This current study can be considered ‘practitioner research’ (Hanks, 2014) conducted by teacher educators for the purpose of understanding a group of practitioners’ reading of research, and in turn, processes of autonomy development.

Context

To encourage teachers’ own informal efforts to autonomy, the first author incorporated TR reading into a course entitled Research in Education, part of a master’s degree in English

Language Teaching, which focused on different qualitative research methodologies. The course was given during the Fall 2016 semester at a university in Istanbul, Turkey. The purpose was twofold: first, to help the students to use think-aloud protocol and experience focus group discussions, and second, to develop their insights into in-service teacher education by reading peers' research. The activity was voluntary and non-assessed, in line with autonomy practice. In the first week, the teachers were given the task of reading a chapter and completing the think aloud task, a week later, they engaged in a focus-group discussion of the TAP transcriptions. This constituted an example of an autonomy-developing PD activity. 11 participants (see Table 1) were invited to do the think aloud task (Ericsson and Simon, 1980).

Insert Table 1 here

The professional development activity: Reading TR

After obtaining consent, we explained how to conduct TAPs, which were to be produced in their own time within seven days. The activity in this research is characterized by the following assumptions, discussed by Manzano Vázquez (2016) with reference to Vieira (2009); Table 2 details the processes and practices involved.

Insert Table 2

This autonomous professional development activity was part of research in education course and aimed to develop teachers' ability to:

- use of think aloud protocols
- transcribe and analyse their own reflection via think-aloud
- understand and interpret their analysis
- grow professionally via data-led reflection

TAP was used as a tool for initiating the autonomous learning process, which involved deep reflection, led by the generated data, described as *data-led reflection* (Walsh and Mann 2015). After the first stage of reflection through thinking-aloud, participants discussed the process with colleagues. Table 3 displays the details of studies selected by participants.

Insert Table 3 here

Data collection tools

In this research, the primary data collection tool, TAPs, were used to see into the minds of individuals (Charters 2003) and identify thinking strategies and processes during a task (Lankshear and Knobel 2004). The tool requires participants to talk through the thinking processes (Branch 2000), allowing insights into the influence of a text on individuals' cognitive processes. While this cannot capture the generalized thought processes, it can shed light on a process at a certain time and context. Verbal protocols can help to understanding teacher thinking (Gatbonton 2008), and concurrent TAPs are regarded as suitable for

understanding teachers' development processes because they allow emerging thoughts to be reported without the need to explain them, i.e., a naturally occurring thinking process with minimal reactivity (Erikson and Simon 1998). Concurrent reporting is considered more suitable than *post hoc* reflection for lengthy tasks, and the monologic TAPs were uninterrupted by the expectations of dialogue (Bernardini 2001). Each of the 11 participants recorded their thoughts during a second reading of the text, to maximize the depth of reflection and interpretation. The protocols averaged 15 minutes.

The think-aloud tasks were transcribed by the participants themselves, and these constituted the main data. The transcripts themselves were used for the basis of the focus group discussions (FGD). The FGD were the second data tool to further elicit reflection on the process and impact of reading TR. Participants had control over the FGD, as part of the university course, with a minimum level of intervention by the teacher educator. The FGD recordings were transcribed by the second author, and were used to supplement the data, and all transcriptions were included in the analysis.

Data Analysis and trustworthiness

In the absence of any pre-existing themes about the potential impact of reading TR studies, we followed grounded theory principles (Glaser and Strauss 2009) to allow themes to emerge from the data. This can lead to induction of categories (Strauss and Corbin 1998), and insights into the teachers' reading processes and reflections over the research reading activity. We were interested in developing or generating theory rather than testing it, and our approach facilitated the generation of unexplored perspectives.

To this end, the inductively analysed data helped us explore the thought patterns, a process for developing themes from verbal data, involving the stages of open, axial and selective coding (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2007, 493). Both researchers read the transcriptions individually, and at the stage of open coding, each coded the transcribed responses to identify readers' meanings, feelings, and thought flow. At the axial stage, we determined links between the identified codes to ensure the interconnectedness of categories (Creswell and Miller 2000). Finally, during selective coding, the axially reduced codes were elaborated on to identify one core theme, *autonomy*. In this stage, all codes were integrated into a coherent whole. At each stage, we negotiated emerging themes to ensure inter-coder reliability by exchanging opinions over differences to reach an agreement, a process which maximizes the rigor of the analysis, known as debriefing. The involvement of the second author, an outsider, was valuable in reducing bias during this process.

Results

In the data section, selected participant comments are classified and interpreted. In line with the literature, the data has been analysed and classified into three autonomy-related themes: developing agency, developing motivation, and the democratisation of professional development. All names are pseudonyms and attributed to either FGD or TAP.

Developing agency

There was evidence that teachers developed a sense of agency, through reading critically, reading to develop their research skills, and interacting with the texts in other ways.

Reading critically

Murat criticized classroom management and the reliability of procedures, emphasizing the need to carefully describe activities. The development of a critical stance is key in the development of autonomy.

The teacher allowed the students to walk round and ask each other, but this raises a big question, how was she able to maintain the classroom management? This wasn't mentioned. (TAP, Murat)

Özge noted the vagueness of the description of the procedures was concerned about the lack of scaffolding. Thus, concerns over the effectiveness of the teaching support influence the teacher's view of the quality of the research.

I have some questions, what about the length of podcasts? And any target language form is compulsory or not? Like using modals... I think some kinds of prompts need to be given to the students (TAP, Özge)

Lara pointed out an ethical issue concerning interviews with student, underlining the need to ensure that data is unbiased.

I hope students gave reliable answers in such a condition, as they cannot say 'I hate your lesson, teacher.' I wish she had chosen one of her colleagues to do the interviews. (TAP, Lara)

Beyza questioned the lack of evidence for conclusions reached, and showed a critical awareness of research requirements:

The researcher is constantly making generalisations with 'they'... but as I read those, I lose credibility. It is hard to believe that all students acted in the same way. At least there should be some quotations from students or some exceptions. (TAP, Beyza)

Learning about conducting research

Cem showed that he was able to learn both from the research content, and also from the visual display of emerging understandings:

I like the self-assessment podcast done by the student...they could be a great source of data that I could decipher... take common codes from the reflection and put them into categories.... What I really like the most is all, the charts and graphs that show the data analysis in detail. I will try to use similar charts. (FGD, Cem)

Özge was introduced to the idea of a reflection section in research papers, and the use of diagrams to represent the writer's understanding of the process of self-reflection.

I am reading 'personal reflection' from this project; this is the first time I have seen such a part. It was a good idea to use diagrams'. (TAP, Özge)

Cem implied he already has a research project in mind. This highlights how reading research contributes ideas at different levels, content and procedures.

I read this action research because I wanted to get an insight about how podcasts can be structured. I wanted to see if I could adapt anything into my action research. (TAP, Cem)

Thus, there seems to be different effects: providing the initial motivation for TR or providing inspiration for further projects according to individual needs.

Drawing conclusions

Osman was able to extrapolate the findings and draw wider conclusions. A TR project can act as data for readers' reflection, as he reported:

Awareness of weak and strong areas is at the top of the list (of the analysed data set). Interestingly, before the study, the students were probably feeling unsafe, however, they have started to feel much better working with the same people, ... designing tasks in such way that everyone is actively involved makes life easier for everyone. (TAP, Osman)

Comparing practices

Reading gives teachers a chance to compare practices. Lara emphasized her autonomy in both her ability to read critically, and her approach to teaching:

She ... made some corrections on the paper...maybe she should have just underlined the incorrect parts and let them... peer check. It would be more student-centred. (TAP, Lara)

Speculation

Osman speculated on the possible reason for a student statement revealing a thought process leading to rhetorical questions, highlighting deep engagement.

She says she speaks English at home but doesn't feel safe in the classroom. Could that be because she doesn't feel ready? There might be psychological barriers. And who is to blame for that? Teacher, students, task? I don't know. (TAP, Osman)

Developing motivation

Another dimension for capability for autonomy is willingness, i.e., motivation. A key theme was teachers' identification with the contexts, which sparked interest and empathy.

Identifying with context

While discussing their reasons for choice of article, participants highlighted similarity of teaching contexts. Nur remarked:

(this is a) university context, it surprisingly resembles my own workplace in many ways. This makes me interested (TAP, Nur)

Fulya reflected on her use of autonomous approaches to teaching, and affirmed that her approach was valid.

I also use peer checking. ... She did a similar thing to me. I generally direct them to ask their friends first, and the writer does here. She also found it beneficial. I see that I do something good. (TAP, Fulya)

This participant commented on the texts ability to trigger reflection on own practice, highlighting the importance of experience and involvement.

TR, I believe, is something we can relate to and reflect more on; I can easily picture myself in that situation. I can even go back to that moment when I had a similar problem in my class (FGD, Beril)

Exercise of choice

Autonomy means freedom to exercise choice in material that could most help them. Choice of text is often related to the closeness of context, and the empathy it creates.

The writer says she was blocking autonomy. That's an interesting sentence because also we don't give students enough time, just cover the units.... This kind of research can be useful, that's why I chose this one. (TAP, Fulya)

Finding inspiration

Another aspect of motivation seems to be the immediate usefulness of some of the results. Even those not intending to carry out research are able to make use of teaching procedures described.

One of the most interesting findings is that some questions lead to anxiety... Instead, the study suggests more guided questions can be more useful... I can benefit from this in my class at university (TAP, Nil)

The following statement seems to show the criteria for engagement with TR: well written, comprehensible, and contingent with the readers own practice.

... this research was beneficial for me, it was fluent, it was easy to read and understand, and applicable, I can also start observing my classes and try to change the situation if necessary. (FGD, Fulya)

Democratising research

Some participants perceived the need for a more democratic and inclusive form of PD. There are two main subthemes, the contrast between TR and formal research, and the identification with a community of autonomous teacher researchers.

Contrasting TR and academic research

Participants focused on accessibility of meaning; comprehensibility is the key to allowing a deeper reflection process. Lara discusses the difficulty of formal research in terms of vocabulary, which disrupts the reading process.

I feel very comfortable when I read action research but when I read academic studies I don't feel comfortable; there is a lot of vocabulary I don't know. I need to search so I need to scan while reading; I try to find some points to make use of. (FGD, Lara)

Beril also favourably contrasted the intelligibility and comprehensibility of the language of TR directly relevant to her own classroom experiences with abstract academic language.

The language of academic research is lofty, there is more philosophy going on... on the other hand, TR language is plain, easy to understand, and it's directly from the classroom and you can connect easily. That makes it more readable and it touches your life. (FGD, Beril)

Nur highlighted a close bond between reader and writer: *The language use is not impersonal, but friendly like a blog article so this is very pleasing to me.* Nur also used a vivid metaphor to distinguish between the two types of research, emphasising the readers' active and passive roles, respectively.

When a professor is using 'eloquent' language, it's like it's raining, and you are not comfortable with the water that drops on your body. You don't feel like getting wet but when you read AR, it's like the water on the floor, a puddle you want to get in and splash the water around with your friends and enjoy the moment of getting wet. (FGD, Nur)

Identification with a community of TR

Derya indicated how being able to empathize can lead her toward undertaking research herself. The participant clearly notes the need for experienced based input and implies solidarity.

When research comes from a peer, we can easily relate to it because whatever they say is more meaningful because we experience the same thing in the classroom...it urges me, and it encourages me to do research as well. (FGD, Derya)

Özge clearly indicated the motivating power of publication, emphasizing her goal as being recognised as a published researcher: *It is written by one of the colleagues like me. I feel I can also put one of my researches on such a book, which is the biggest impact on me. (TAP, Özge)*

Derya highlighted the role of collegiality and closeness; the status equality with the author is critical in her readiness to read and understand the chapter and use it as a model. Simplicity is equated with effectiveness.

My friend has done this and this is what she found. Maybe I should try it and I could find something else because the case is very simple and it's there and it's living. (FGD, Derya)

The same reader highlighted the encouragement to carry out research herself:

...and it is doable... when I read an (formal research) article, I think, 'how am I going to do such a paper?' But when I read TR, I feel encouraged. I can do this; I can take it to an AR level, so it will encourage me to become a researcher. (FGD, Derya)

Interestingly, rather than 'do research', this teacher aims to 'become a researcher', suggesting identification with the group.

A more extreme view is expressed by Nur, who is not only encouraged to research, but experiences extreme emotion, a feeling of being left out of a community.

I remember the first time I read an AR article, the feeling I got was a sneaking biting jealousy, why shouldn't I do the same, I must do the same, why didn't I think about it before? (FGD, Nur)

For Nil, the spread of a collective practice within institutions implied a community:

It sparked a lot of interest. I would like to go for an AR at my university. ... I'm sure that there would be a lot of people interested and we can increase our motivation. (FGD, Nil)

The encouragement to research, based on feelings of community, and the confidence and personal empowerment it brings. Even a minor role can contribute to this feeling of community, as Nur demonstrated: "By the way, giving this feedback also makes me feel valued".

Discussion

The findings revealed three major themes with a number of sub-themes that conceptually support them as follows. The first is developing agency, which relates to capabilities (Benson, 2007) for enacting autonomy. By reading critically learning about conducting research, drawing conclusions, comparing practices and speculating, the participants developed their skills to become agents of their engagement. The second theme is developing motivation, which is deemed to be a component of autonomy development (Ryan and Deci, 2000), where the participants identified with context, exercised freedom of choice and were inspired by reading the texts. The final theme was democratising research, which we argue, relates to the 'pedagogy of autonomy' (Jimenez Raya and Vieira 2018). The participants displayed this aspect by contrasting TR and academic research as well as identifying themselves with a community of TR. Based on the themes that emerged, we now answer our research questions:

1. How do teachers interact with TR articles as readers during the reading process?

Participants were given complete freedom in conducting the TAP task, leading to different highly personalised interpretation of the texts, in line with findings regarding the idiosyncratic nature of teacher knowledge and development (Rankin and Becker, 2006; Cain, 2015). Thus, the potential contribution to PD from a particular article will vary according to individuals (Golombek and Doran, 2014). However, within the diversity, certain general purposes for reading were observed: to compare their own practices, whether actual or projected, with the author's, to use the research to promote more general reflection on the

research, and finally, to reflect on their own roles as (potential researchers). First, teachers used the texts to compare practises, learn from the writer, confirm their own practices, and criticize research or teaching procedures. The second purpose was to interpret the action reported. At least one teacher looked outside his own immediate experience, triggering a process of speculation. Finally, teachers used the texts to strengthen their view of themselves as peers of researchers, and to adopt the identity of a (potential) member of a research community. This was expressed in terms of being inspired research by the text, the realisation that TR is manageable, and that the authors were their peers. This range of reactions emphasizes freedom to interpret the texts, by comparing practices, building their own theory by arriving at their own interpretations, and finding inspiration to take on a new role.

2. What are the emerging insights into autonomy development from the teachers' reflection over the reading process?

TA has been extensively discussed in terms of supporting classroom learning, but we extend this concept to the support of professional learning. First, the TAP allowed the verbalization, clarification, and formalization of thoughts, while in the second stage, reflecting on 'while reading' thoughts in the discussion groups provided deeper reflection. The significance of this approach taken by the teacher educator to autonomy development lay in its encouragement to face the challenge of autonomous learning (ManzanoVázquez 2016). The innovation was twofold: first, the teacher educator undertook the role of facilitator of autonomous learning opportunities with minimal intervention (Ushioda 2011). Second, teachers were encouraged to use their own knowledge, skills and confidence to promote autonomous learning (Jiménez Raya and Vieira 2008).

Differences among teachers in context, length of experience, and identity, are likely to lead to different interpretations of, and attitudes towards autonomy (Benson 2010). Teachers take on different roles when reading: some are more oriented to the role of teacher, developing their own theory, and others, to the role of researcher (Bartels 2003, 748). Thus, some used the texts for data-driven reflection (Walsh and Mann 2015) identifying with the context and difficulties of the authors, while others were encouraged to take on a stronger researcher identity, to carry out and publish research or adopt a more critical approach, attempting to assess the validity of the research.

There has been debate over the relationship between motivation and autonomy. In line with Dam (1995), and Little (2004), Ushioda (2011) believes that the initial granting of autonomy i.e., engaging students in 'making plans and decisions about their learning' leads to improvements in intrinsic motivation, and she highlights the need for initial self-determination and personal agency (Ryan and Deci 2000). In this respect, the personal agency involved in developing through reading TR may have increased the motivation to complete the task, while even the initial minimal motivation to read a peer's paper could have sparked autonomy, leading to greater control over learning (Vieira 2009), and to greater self-regulation of the process of reading and reflection.

However, there is also evidence for a complex interaction between different aspects of autonomy. There may be an initial need for agency to trigger autonomy, and this process may eventually lead to a new identity (Benson 2007), but Huang (2011) points out that the relationships between various aspects of autonomy can interact in complex, non-linear ways: and he argues the emergence of a different teacher identity may be both a cause and a result of autonomy.

This study reveals that the participants' positioning of themselves as (potential) researchers was related to different aspects of autonomy. For some, this desire seemed more identity-related (the need for TR as a more suitable alternative to academic research), for others, it was more related to agency (the view that research is achievable and valuable for teachers), and yet others, to affective and motivational aspects (emulating and collaborating with peers). We believe that these are different routes towards the same end, teachers meeting their own development needs, but also converging to greater autonomy. Thus, exploring the 'space of possibilities' (Vieira and Moreira 2008), teachers experienced the willingness to become autonomous, and gained a sense of responsibility (Deci and Flaste 1996).

Implications: The role of teacher education in promoting autonomy

This qualitative study aimed at shedding light on the process of the encouragement of autonomy, revealed the key themes of agency, motivation and identity. It was shown that the TR reading task created motivation to read research, a professional development activity which emerged as a powerful tool to support TA.

In this study, we argue that the texts were instrumental in promoting autonomy in three main areas: developing agency, motivation and joining a community of research engaged teachers. First, the reading experience created opportunities to be reflective and reflexive, which led to the development of agency. There was evidence of growth in reflection ability in the TAPs, through triggering questions and interest, and opportunity for comparison with their own practice. There was also evidence of a higher level of reflexivity, as readers questioned and problematized the issues under consideration. Thus, they were able to identify problems, suggest solutions and visualize potential courses of action. Second, they increased their motivation, validating their own understandings. They approached text with a positive attitude because the relevance to their professional practices and interests and were emotionally engaged. Finally, there was evidence of increased awareness of their value as researchers whose ideas were not only valid, but worth researching and even publishing.

The facilitative factors included context familiarity, a relevant research topic, the practical format and comprehensible language. These allowed readers to benefit from the research in a way that could inform their beliefs and practices, based on a common teaching context. Second, readers were able to develop their roles as readers, and consequently, as potential writers. The experience boosted self-efficacy by (a) providing relevant practical knowledge, (b) generating motivation to read and conduct more research, and (c) setting examples of feasible research for practicing teachers. Based on the findings, TR has the following potentials to:

- be beneficial to other teachers when directly relevant and comprehensible
- generate interest where readers and writers work in a similar context
- facilitate the process of reading research due to its language, and relevance
- be used for deeper, data-led reflection and reflexivity
- trigger a highly personal learning process, based on the reader's motivation
- create an appropriate input for teacher's development
- promote deeper comprehension of the research process and results
- promote positive attitude toward reading research

Although the study documented several benefits of reading TR, we acknowledge three main limitations. First the study focused on reflection on TR but did not follow up on whether reading actually led to readers conducting TR themselves. Second, the data were collected through just two instruments over a limited period. Finally, to strengthen the understanding of the impact of such reading on teacher learning and development, the participants should be granted opportunities to discuss the results of the study, which would make teachers more aware of reading/reflection processes and the role of TR in promoting professional autonomy. In the light of these discussions, TAPs and FGDs may be particularly suitable as teacher education strategies aimed at developing autonomy. Teacher educators should be encouraged to conduct ‘practitioner research’ on their teacher education practices since practitioner research is not for teachers alone, but for all educators.

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