

## BOOK REVIEW

**Being a Teacher | Researcher. A Primer on Doing Authentic Inquiry Research on Teaching and Learning, by Konstantinos Alexakos (2015). Sense Publishers, 122 pages, Paperback \$54.00, Hardcover \$99.00, eBook (no price available), ISBN 978-9-46300-293-6 (Paperback), ISBN: 978-9-46300-294-3, eBook: 978-9-46300-295-0.**

*Nathaly González*

*Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain*

*Review received 17 May 2016, accepted 18 May 2016, final version 25 May 2016*

*DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5565/rev/jtl3.681>*

---

The book, *Being a Teacher | Researcher. A Primer on Doing Authentic Inquiry Research on Teaching and Learning*, by Konstantinos Alexakos, claims to be a primer for doing authentic inquiry research on teaching and learning. It is short in length, especially in comparison with research methodology handbooks, at only about 100 pages in length. The vocabulary employed is accessible and, frequently, when specific terminology is employed, description is offered. However, it needs to be said that this is not an easy text to get through. It is content loaded and some chapters may require more than one reading to really understand the ideas being raised. Readers with no training in academic research might find it very complex. The primer seems to be written for Master's or PhD level students doing, or starting to do, research. Therefore, it is possibly not the perfect starting read for teachers who wish to be introduced to background theory on adopting a teacher | researcher role. That being so, it has to be said, that the more practical part of the book, the last six chapters, are a great aid for teachers who need guidance to become teacher | researchers, as they are based on specific examples and step by step descriptions. The book would be a great choice for Master's or PhD level students who feel lost developing a teacher | researcher role, whether that be in their own or someone else's classroom.

The book is structured around twelve chapters and, as stated by the author, divided into four sections. The first five chapters are dedicated to the theory behind authentic inquiry research methodology. The following four, chapters six to nine, are more concerned with practical issues and examples. The third section, chapters ten and eleven, are dedicated to real experiences of the author. The last section is one chapter, chapter twelve, that sums up the book and includes the final remarks of the author. Apart from the twelve chapters, there is a section with appendices, bibliographical references, and an index of major notions.

In the first five chapters, the theory outlined is somehow difficult to grasp for beginning researchers, as the organization of the concepts is not very straightforward. All the concepts are very well explained in detail, but a general overview of the relationship between the concepts, and within educational research, seems to be lacking. Therefore, while more advanced master's or PhD students might not find the chapters less difficult to understand, a teacher with no notion of research theory and methodology would find it quite difficult to access.

The second part of the book is, nonetheless, written to reach non-expert readers. All the practical aspects are very well detailed and steps are offered as to guide the reader in real-life applications of the methodology. Teachers can get a clear picture of the role of a teacher | researcher, as well as a step-by-step proposal of how to implement authentic inquiry research in a real classroom.

The third section includes real teacher | researcher experiences of the author and are very detailed. However, the research examples are all set in secondary education settings and no relation is made to lower levels, such as primary education. Therefore, some readers may find that a representation of the specific context of other educational levels' is missing – maybe not only in the experiences, but also throughout the book more generally.

The fourth section of the book is dedicated to the final remarks. As for the appendix, all the documents included are very relevant for doing authentic inquiry research in education and serve the reader very well. Such documents are indispensable during the research process and therefore are as a key contribution of the book. The index of main concepts is always handy as it helps the reader to locate concepts in different chapters of the book.

Going into the content of the chapters in more depth, the first chapter is dedicated to the introduction. Alexakos offers a brief explanation of his work and the reasons behind it, as well as a description of the book and its sections. The author offers a very passionate view of the relevance of authentic inquiry research and the role of teacher | researchers. Alexakos discusses the issue of objectivity and subjectivity behind being teachers as researchers and states: "Biases and interests in research, as in science, can either impede understanding or lead to innovative thought and revolutionary backgrounds" (2015, p. 4) The chapter also includes a justification for authentic inquiry methodology, a brief outline of the axiology and epistemology behind the methodology and some recommendation on how to use the book.

The second chapter is dedicated to sociocultural theory, within which authentic inquiry is grounded. In the chapter a fair description of the theory is given and it serves as

justification for choosing authentic inquiry as the research methodology and for the joint role of teacher | researcher. Some complex concepts, such as dialectics, ontology and heteroglossia, do arise in the chapter, but a description is given of them. As I have stated previously, some readers may find it necessary to read this chapter more than once.

The third chapter is a very brief and well-selected summary of the evolution of research around teachers. It guides the reader to understand the objectivity behind the apparent subjectivity of teachers as researchers of their own practices. It also highlights the importance of research done by teachers for teachers and not for academics by academics who do not step into the classroom. Authentic inquiry research and the role of teacher | researcher is presented as a need and as a source of “practices based on emergent theory” (2015, p. 29)

The fourth chapter defines briefly but clearly some of the core concepts of a research framework, as well as some methods of data compilation that can be used during authentic inquiry research. The chapter is a jewel if the reader is acquainted with the basics of research frameworks. More inexpert readers may find this chapter very confusing and decide to read it more than once or to leave it behind. The chapter lacks a clearer map of the relationship of all the concepts mentioned to research and to the decisions that a teacher | researcher has to make for the design of their teaching and research practice.

The fifth chapter, which is the last chapter dedicated to theory, outlines the authentic inquiry research framework. The chapter offers a table to compare conventional research and authentic inquiry research. Some new concepts appear, such as heuristics, and thus can leave readers in a position of not knowing where to place these new concepts in relation to the previous concepts mentioned. However it offers great insight into research inquiry issues such as when is a good time to finalize the research. The last figure is a great summary of the main points taken into consideration when using authentic inquiry research, and can be used as a checklist by expert and non-expert readers.

Chapter six is dedicated to tensions, ethics and conflicts. It is the first chapter in the practical section. This chapter is very explicit and would be of great help for both expert and in-expert readers. Expert readers will find common issues outlined that arise during research and non-expert readers will find a very tangible description of the tensions, ethics, conflicts and vulnerabilities that can, and often do, arise when carrying out a study. For this reason, it is a very useful chapter for non-expert readers as well as experts.

The seventh chapter is dedicated to Institutional Review Boards (IRB) and the dissemination of research. It is a chapter that proves to be of help for teachers that conduct

formal research in their classroom and decide to disseminate their findings in the education community. It is a chapter, however, that focuses very much on the IRB process in the author's own context. Those teacher | researchers conducting formal research, but that have a different IRB-type process, could find this chapter useful but somehow shallow. The appendix dedicated to consent forms is of great aid in any case.

Chapter eight shows the basics of a research framework outline. It goes briefly into sections of the research framework such as: participants selection, methods and data resources, research questions, inquiry and findings, generalizability, informed writings, and interventions. This chapter is a very handy outline of the research planning process.

Chapter nine is exclusively dedicated to the final stages of a research project – the writing up and the presentation stages. It is a very complete guide for formal research, although, possibly does not cover everything that PhD students or similar need to know and be able to do. The table provided is of great aid in the writing of a formal paper. The checklist and presentation guides are very handy as well. The additional suggestions are little jewels that should be followed by every researcher.

Chapter ten, the first chapter in the third section, is dedicated to the beginnings of the writer as a teacher | researcher. It is an anecdotal chapter that provides an insight into the beginnings of a teacher | researcher. Non-expert readers may find this chapter not only easy to read but also inspiring.

Chapter eleven is a description of a real experience of a more experienced Alexakos. The chapter describes a more complex situation and proves to be a great insight into tensions and conflicts that can arise during research, even for experienced researchers. The description also aids the reader to picture the complexity of the role of a teacher | researcher and of research in the classroom. It gives authentic inquiry research a quality that appears difficult to find in other types of research. The teacher | researcher is portrayed as a sensitive character that is not only focusing on theories but on learners' and teachers' growth.

The last chapter, the one dedicated to the final remarks, is a very short chapter written in a personal style. Alexakos outlines, using his own voice, the importance and relevance of authentic inquiry research and of teachers adopting the role of researchers. Alexakos advocates for the transformation authentic inquiry research can trigger not only for the practices of the teacher that researches his or her own practice, but also for the person behind the researcher.

To sum up, *Being a Teacher | Researcher. A Primer on Doing Authentic Inquiry Research on Teaching and Learning*, by Konstantinos Alexakos is a book that is very short in length but complete and often complex. The book will be best appreciated by expert readers who will be able to digest all the implications behind setting up a research framework. However, non-expert reader can find, especially in the practical chapters, a very clear guide into designing research in the classroom through the role of teacher | researcher.

This review is objective in the specific context of a PhD candidate that has used this framework as the basis of research done in her own pre-school classroom, through her role as teacher | researcher, in Catalonia, Spain. Thus, from personal experience, the teacher | researcher behind this review definitely recommends this book as a primer for authentic inquiry research to other readers interested in teacher | researcher roles.

**Author's details:** **Nathaly González** is a pre-school teacher and a PhD candidate at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, concerned with innovation in early childhood settings. Her main interests are digital literacy and very young learners. Her role as a teacher | researcher has allowed her to learn from her very young students that in a highly technology-mediated society children can, if empowered to, be active members.

**Email:** [nathaly-gonzalez-acevedo@outlook.com](mailto:nathaly-gonzalez-acevedo@outlook.com)

---

To cite this article:

González, N. (2016). Book review: Being a teacher | researcher. A primer on doing authentic inquiry research on teaching and learning, by Konstantinos Alexakos (2015). *Bellaterra Journal of Teaching & Learning Language & Literature*, 9(2), 115-119. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5565/rev/jtl3.681>

