

Teacher Learning and Language Teaching: **2 Reviews**

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TEACHER LEARNING IN LANGUAGE TEACHING. Freeman, D. & Richards, J. C. (Eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. \$21.95

Review by Robert Yates

According to Freeman, one of the editors, *Teaching Learning and Language Teaching* is a first attempt to study the "unstudied problem," how people learn to teach. For teacher educators, this topic is of crucial importance. Although Johnson (Chapter 2) asserts that most teacher education programs assume that when teachers complete their pre-service training they will become effective teachers, I know of no teacher educator who is so boastful. If the sixteen chapters really did consistently offer "deeper and closer examinations of how language teachers come to know what they know and do what they do in their work," as claimed in the preface, this would be an important first step. Unfortunately, there is little consistency in quality in volume's sixteen chapters and considerably more chaff than wheat.

The contributions are divided into four sections: Beginnings, five chapters on the initial experiences of language teaching; Transitions, four chapters on experienced teachers who are struggling with how to teach new subjects or different kinds of students or proficiency levels; Learning to Teach, six chapters on the impact of teacher education, both pre- and in- service courses; Epilogue, the final chapter by Freeman which attempts to define the framework for further research on the "unstudied problem."

For a new field of inquiry, it is important that the various contributors used a variety of data-gathering techniques: interviews, survey questionnaires, journals, examination of course assignments or classroom observations. It is not good, however, that the presentations of the data are couched in such a high level of generality that a reader has no idea what the teachers know or how their practices are influenced by what they know or how practices have changed because of new teaching or in-service experiences. The discussions of teacher knowledge presented in Knezevic and Scholl (Chapter 4), Smith (Chapter 9), Pennington (Chapter 15) are particularly cursory.

This text would have been valuable with more chapters like Ulchiny (Chapter 8). She provides specific transcripts from a lesson, discusses a teacher's reflections on the lesson,

and then provides a transcript of a lesson which reflects a change in practice. This chapter would be worthwhile to use in a practicum course. The first step on examining teacher learning is much too small to be recommended.

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Review by Richard Day

Donald Freeman and Jack Richards are among the vanguard of ESL professionals who have taken the lead in defining and developing the field of ESL teacher education. Their collaboration as editors of the volume *Teacher Learning in Language Teaching* is another substantive contribution to our understanding of how we learn to teach languages.

Teacher Learning in Language Teaching has 16 chapters. The first 15 are all original pieces of research on how teachers learn to teach languages, and are organized into three sections: Section I Beginnings: Starting out in language teaching (Chapters 1-5); Section II Transitions: Learning in the practice of teaching (Chapters 6-9); and Section III Learning to teach: The role of language teacher education. The final section, Chapter 16, is a summary chapter by Freeman.

I found this organization somewhat arbitrary. It was not clear what criteria were used to place the 15 chapters in the three sections. For example, Amy B. M. Tsui's report of how a teacher in Hong Kong learned to teach ESL writing, is found in Section I which is characterized by the editors as describing "the beginning stages of teacher learning" (p. 3). The teacher described in Tsui's research already had two years of teaching experience before the research project. Moreover, there seems to be little difference in the focus of many of the articles in the first and third sections.

However, these organizational problems do not detract from the volume's overall quality. There are a number of excellent research reports, including Karen Johnson's investigation into the TESOL practicum (Chapter 2); Gloria Gutierrez Almarza's longitudinal study of the professional development of four L2 teachers (Chapter 4); Anne Burns' research into the relationship between the beliefs and practices of an experienced ESL teacher (Chapter 7); and Michael Wallace's discussion of the professional project (Chapter 13). Particularly noteworthy is Polly Ulichny's ethnographic investigation of an ESL classroom (Chapter 8).

Another positive feature of the volume is the broad focus of the 15 chapters. There are studies of teachers and teacher education programs in both ESL and EFL settings, and

in Spanish and French as foreign language programs. Also impressive is the variety of data-gathering strategies, from survey questionnaires to classroom observations.

Teacher Learning in Language Teaching, however, is not free from a problem common to many edited volumes—an unevenness of the quality of the articles. Indeed, it might be that the normal bell curve of distribution is at work in the volume.

I agree with the editors' claim that the volume "illuminates the nature of learning to teach second or foreign languages . . ." (p. 1). *Teacher Learning in Language Teaching* should be read by all those interested in the education and development of second and foreign language teachers.

About the Reviewers

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