

## Book Reviews

### *Understanding Expertise in Teaching: Case Studies of ESL Teachers*

A. Tsui. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Pp. xii + 308. ISBN 0-521-63569-1 (pbk); £18.95.

This commendable contribution to the Cambridge Applied Linguistics series aims to analyse the nature of expertise in language teaching and how it is developed in teachers. It accomplishes these goals by means of qualitative case studies of four ESL teachers working in a secondary school in Hong Kong. Whilst being a work of applied linguistics, it is also based firmly in the roots of the parent discipline of education. So, although principally being of interest to those working in language fields, it would also be of relevance to educationalists.

The target audience for the book is stated as being teachers, teacher educators and researchers interested in teaching expertise and teachers' professional development. Chapter 1 provides a brief introduction to the focus of the book and an overview.

Chapter 2 investigates the notion of expertise and mines an impressive array of literature in different fields, including the expertise of chess masters as well as more traditional disciplines, such as law and medicine. A key point here is the identification of expertise as being the ability to cope with difficult, ill-defined matters rather than routine ones (Eraut, 1994).

Chapter 3 relates these theories to studies of expertise in teaching. Tsui identifies two gaps in the existing literature: (1) insufficient understanding of what constitutes the knowledge of the expert teacher, and (2) how such expertise is acquired. This chapter also emphasises the complexity of teaching and how tacit knowledge becomes internalised through experience.

Chapter 4 looks at different types of teacher knowledge, including well-known conceptualisations by Shulman, Schön, and others. Whilst these initial chapters serve their purpose in setting the stage for the study and providing a theoretical framework, it might have been possible to survey recent literature more comprehensively (e.g. Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Glaser, 1999; Harris, 1998; Munby *et al.*, 2001). Overall, around half of the references in the book pre-date 1990 and only a small percentage are 1997 or later.

Chapter 5 is a careful account of the research methodology for the case studies. The important issue of generalisability is treated at the beginning of this section with Tsui arguing that she wishes to generalise at a theoretical level rather than across ESL teachers as a population. In this chapter, Tsui also pays due consideration to ethical issues which are described in some detail. I particularly appreciated the discussion of reciprocity, and the idea that informants in this kind of research should themselves derive benefit from their participation. In this case, I felt no doubt that the four teachers gained immeasurably from their interaction with a scholar and teacher educator such as Tsui.

The book really comes alive in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, when the teachers take centre-stage. These chapters are a fascinating account of the professional development and classroom practices of the four teachers, all of whom entered the

teaching profession as untrained subject graduates (i.e. without receiving pre-service professional training). The story of the expert teacher, Marina, is particularly compelling as the reader sees the development of her expertise during her first decade of teaching experience, supported by various periods of in-service teacher education.

Chapter 6 contains some biographical introduction to the teachers and then Tsui deftly steers us through the stages in their development as teachers. The fact that the case study teachers all work in the same school permits some integration of their stories and how they influenced each other. The extensive use of interview data (translated into English from the original Cantonese) allows us to hear and interpret the teachers' voices and those of their students.

In Chapter 7, the author examines how the teachers handled the management of the classroom in order to promote learning. A particular focus here is on how teachers structure their first two lessons with a new class. Whilst establishing routines is an important part of being a teacher, having the judgement to know when to deviate from routines is a characteristic of the expert teacher. This chapter also identifies a wealth of classroom strategies of relevance to both teachers and teacher educators, including the topics of time management strategies to increase opportunities for learning, maximising use of the target language (avoiding over-use of the mother tongue), and how to encourage students to be attentive when their classmates are presenting or reporting.

In view of Hong Kong teachers' emphasis on discipline and its role in moral development, a useful distinction is made between discipline for its own sake and how it can be related to student learning (p. 142). For example, the expert teacher seems able to judge more readily the balance between on-task noise which can be tolerated or even encouraged and off-task noise which is not permitted readily. Classroom episodes exemplify how such strategies are implemented in practice.

Chapter 8 looks at how the curriculum is enacted. Here there is a particular focus on grammar teaching, which was identified by all four teachers as being a central challenge. One of the characteristics of Marina's expertise is her ability to draw links between theoretical input from in-service professional training, her experience as a language learner of German and her classroom practice. For example, her approach to grammar is firmly grounded in inductive approaches to grammatical rules and the need to present grammatical form in context, something that she had studied formally and experienced as a learner of German.

Chapter 9 explores how Marina tackled the challenge of introducing process writing within her panel (i.e. department). Her success in implementing process writing with 10 teachers across 15 classes, demonstrates her ability in the management of change as well as in teaching. At times, I felt that there could have been more reference made to other school-based research in Hong Kong, and in this chapter it was a little surprising not to find any cross-reference to the existing body of work on process writing (e.g. Pennington & Cheung, 1995).

The concluding chapter revisits the concept of expertise through a discussion of the differences between the expert, experienced non-expert and novice teachers. Tsui's claim for theoretical significance lies in advancing our knowledge of the nature of expertise which she characterises as 'constant engagement in exploration and experimentation, in problematising the unproblematic, and respond-

ing to challenges' (pp. 277–8). She also distinguishes between expert performance and the process of the development of expertise, emphasising the importance of the latter.

Overall, this book is highly recommended for those interested in the nature and development of expertise in teaching, qualitative classroom-based research or the lives of teachers. One of the strong-points of the book is that it explores what teachers are doing in their classroom and relates these actions to their beliefs. A further pleasing feature, from my point of view, is that it originates from outside the dominant English first language countries whilst portraying school teachers who other practitioners may easily relate to. Some international readers may however query the transferability of insights to their own context, a perennial challenge for case study researchers (Bassey, 1999). But in my view, the queries over generalisability are far outweighed by the fine-grained analysis of teachers' lives in their particular school context. In conclusion, the book provides plenty of stimulating material for teacher educators and researchers in Hong Kong and elsewhere.

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## *Australian Policy Activism in Language and Literacy*

J. Lo Bianco and R. Wickert (eds). Melbourne, Australia: Language Australia, 2001. Pp. xii + 401. ISBN 1-876768-31-2 (pbk): Aus\$45.00.

*Australian Policy Activism in Language and Literacy* is a unique contribution to the literature on language and literacy policy. It is unique because it offers insiders' accounts into the development and implementation of language policy in Australia. The editors locate this book within the policy science literature rather than the more commonly used area of applied linguistics. Through the editors' skilful interweaving of the five sections of the volume, readers are provided with an account of recent language policy in Australia where multiple perspectives and readings of this policy are possible. The 17 chapters are written by a group of