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Book Review: Understanding expertise in teaching. Case studies of ESL teachers.

Bill Johnston

Language Teaching Research 2004; 8; 347

DOI: 10.1191/1362168804lr148xx

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Book reviews

Amy B.M. Tsui 2003: *Understanding expertise in teaching. Case studies of ESL teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 308 pp. \$19.00 (PB). ISBN 0 521 63569 1.

In recent years, researchers in the fields of language teaching and language teacher education have expressed a keen interest in the question of what makes a good language teacher. A number of different and complementary perspectives have been taken on this issue. These approaches, which have often though not always taken their cue from research in general education, have included research in teacher learning (Freeman and Richards, 1996), Woods' (1996) concept of KAB or knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, and work looking at the knowledge base of language teaching (e.g., Johnston and Goettsch, 2000).

Tsui's admirable and engaging book is a welcome addition to this literature, and it will be of particular relevance to researchers in language teaching and language teacher education. It offers two main contributions: (a) a rich intellectual survey of, and contribution to, the research literature on expertise; and (b) a detailed depiction of teachers at work. In the latter, Tsui analyses the teaching performance of four ESL teachers of varying levels of experience working in a single secondary school in Hong Kong, thereby contributing her own empirical research in the quest to understand the nature of expertise in teaching.

In Chapters 1–4, Tsui offers a useful overview of the conceptual and empirical literature on expertise, drawing on sources both inside and outside education, and including the crucial topic of teacher knowledge. She very clearly lays out the various attempts that have been made to analyse qualities such as expert knowledge, automaticity, reflectiveness, intuition, flexibility, efficiency and autonomy, that together constitute expertise in teaching and other occupations.

Despite the growing research base in the TESOL and applied linguistics literatures, there is still a paucity of accounts of actual

teaching. In response, Chapters 5–9 of Tsui's book offer a wonderfully detailed picture of four teachers, with one in particular, Marina, at centre stage. Many have called for teachers themselves to have more presence in the professional discourse of the field; Tsui's study is a good example of how this might be accomplished, and the author does an excellent job of describing and analysing the work of her four teachers. Tsui not only paints a rich portrait of Marina's work, but also leads us to a fuller appreciation of it through her careful analysis. Her depictions of classroom and professional events are a valuable source for researchers, teacher educators and teachers themselves. Furthermore, it is especially refreshing to see descriptions of teachers' work that go beyond classroom interaction to include curricular and administrative duties, which surely form an integral part of that work, yet are so often ignored in the research literature.

Above all, as summarized in Chapter 10, Tsui makes a number of important original contributions to the literature on teacher expertise; these are of value both in the field of language teaching and in that of general education. First, Tsui demonstrates the importance of teasing apart the notions of 'experienced' and 'expert' teacher, and identifies what it is that marks the second. For example, contrary to earlier accounts of expertise as 'effortless practice', expert teachers actually engage in what Tsui, drawing on the work of Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993), calls 'progressive problem-solving', seeking out new challenges that keep them on their toes and help them to continue to grow professionally. Secondly, unlike the practical orientation found in much of the literature on teaching expertise, Tsui reveals how, in fact, theory and practice are both essential in expertise, and indeed are inseparable. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, Tsui argues for a conceptualization of expertise as a process, rather than a fixed state (as much of the earlier literature saw it), and for a focus on the 'development of expertise'. By this, Tsui refers to the fact that the quality of continual development and the taking on of new challenges noted in expert teachers is the very same process that allows them to reach a high level of expertise in the first place. This extremely helpful insight, and the other innovative aspects of

Tsui's analysis, are likely to lead to valuable new directions in research, not just in teacher expertise *per se* but also more broadly in teacher learning, teacher development and teacher education. Specifically, Tsui's work shows how important it is to connect the notion of expertise to the processes of teacher learning both within and beyond formal teacher education, and research that addresses this connection will be particularly important.

Although this work will prove to be of considerable value to future understanding of and research on teacher expertise, I do have one relatively minor criticism. The book draws almost exclusively on sources from mainstream education, and makes very little reference to research and theory from within TESOL or applied linguistics, despite the clear focus on 'ESL teachers' in the title. My suspicion is that the book may have spent an inordinate length of time in production – there are few references after 1998, and none after 2000 – and this might explain the omission, since much of the relevant empirical and theoretical work has been published in the last five years. Unfortunately, this absence gives the impression that our field is much more reliant on work from the outside than is currently the case, and it means that ideas such as the unified (though complex) nature of teacher knowledge, or the indivisibility of theory and practice, are presented as new, whereas in fact they have already been voiced in our field. I was particularly surprised to find no mention of Freeman and Johnson's (1998) seminal paper on teacher knowledge, or of other important work such as Golombek's (1998) treatment of personal practical knowledge; Johnson and Golombek's (2002) edited volume on teachers' narrative ways of knowing, from the same publisher as Tsui's book, would also have been relevant.

These shortcomings aside, *Understanding expertise in teaching* is a fine contribution to the literature on language teaching. Tsui marshals a great deal of interesting and relevant research; she does an excellent job of presenting her own well-thought-out and fascinating study; and she has important theoretical contributions to make. This is a book that anyone interested in effective teaching in real language classrooms will wish to have in their library.

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Bill Johnston
Indiana University

Hugh Trappes-Lomax and **Gibson Ferguson**, editors, 2002: *Language in language teacher education*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins. 257 pp. \$32.95 (PB). 1 58811 260 8 (PB).

Language is the subject of the language teaching profession and it is the substance of our expertise. Consequently, developing knowledge about and skills in language should be a core goal of language teacher education (LTE). The scope of such knowledge and skills ranges widely, including knowledge about the following: (a) the target language system (e.g., phonology, lexis, grammar); (b) sociolinguistic aspects of target language use (e.g., standard language, registers, norms); and (c) learner language development. It also implies skills in the following: (d) conducting lessons and interacting with students spontaneously in the second language (L2); (e) analysing the target language and learner language; and (f) selecting and manipulating items and materials for effective L2 learning. Numerous books are available that deal with these