

BOOKSHELF

This month's reviews come from three major international publishers of books for language learners, teachers and teacher trainers. One is from a less internationally known but important source: Edinburgh University Press. Coincidentally, or perhaps not, two of the titles include mention of 'strategies'. Empowering students by providing them with learning strategies came first and then it was the turn of teachers. All the books mentioned here assist in empowering teachers to make classrooms places where learning takes place in a positive atmosphere.

Strategies for language learners

The first book is the multi-authored *The learning strategies handbook*. Anna Uhl Chamot, whose name appears as the first author, has been writing on this topic since the late eighties. Here, the readership is, in particular, teachers of school aged learners, although "most lessons are easily adaptable to different language contexts and proficiency levels" (P.9). The first two sections (Chapters 1-3 and 4-8) are announced as theory and the third as "From theory to practice" but this seems to be less of a strict division than a reminder that theory and practice depend on each other.

In Chapter 3 (*Instructional framework*) scaffolding is illustrated by a list of helpful suggestions of the "What to do if..." type". Here is one. "Instead of verbal reminders to choose a strategy, refer students to a poster of choice" (p.40). Section two deals with CALLA strategies: the cognitive academic language learning approach. In various parts of the world this approach has been implemented as 'language and content', 'language across the curriculum' and other terms. One of the photocopiable worksheets provides a list of questions to encourage student reflection on their learning strategies.

The third and lengthiest part of the book starts with a theoretical chapter on research into learning strategies, where the works of O'Malley and Chamot and of Rebecca Oxford are explained. Then the text becomes even more specific. Writing, reading and vocabulary are well covered, speaking and listening less so.

For readers who appreciated Chamot's 1990 book, but found it heavy reading, this volume is the answer. Using larger-than-usual page size, the format is designed for busy teachers who want to dip into ideas and for those with more time who appreciate up-to-date summaries. Visually, the book is appealing with its large print and its many pictures, tables and charts. Margins are wide, and in some cases have mini-tips. One can imagine readers who have not been schooled since infancy never to write in books, making their own notes in the many spaces.

This book would have a place on the departmental bookshelves of primary or secondary schools.

Professional development for language teachers

Continuing the theme of strategies, but this time for teacher learning is the 2005 book by Richards and Farrell. The readership for books in the *Language Teacher Education* series is initially teacher educators and the people in their courses. However, in many of the books there is helpful support for classroom teachers who might be some time away from pre-service or in-service training. Why wait to be sent on a course to take advantage of a book like this?

The subtitle, "Strategies for teacher learning", gives a clue to the many practical ideas in the 200 pages. Concerned about being professionally isolated? Then why not start a teacher support group as suggested in Chapter 4? As the authors point out, this "is not a staff meeting or an in-service activity such as a workshop" (p. 51). Indeed, group members need not even be at the same school. Three teachers at different schools in Seoul videotaped their lessons as the basis for group discussions. In a more formal arrangement, ten Singapore primary teachers had government funding for their support meetings.

Chapter 8 shows how teachers can work alone to develop their teaching strategies through analyzing critical incidents. These are classroom events, either positive or negative, that prompt a teacher to stop and reflect on their meaning. Instead of "answers", the authors supply questions to make the reader identify what has happened and why and to look for alternative ways of responding.

Halfway between having a group and working alone is peer coaching, which is the subject of Chapter 10. This is an arrangement where two teachers combine to offer support either one-way or to each other. It can happen through conversations, through preparing materials together, lesson observation, co-teaching or watching videotaped lessons together. The book provides 'Vignettes' in the form of first person accounts from classrooms in various countries to bring alive the general principles. Although the countries of origin are not always mentioned in the vignettes, there seems to be a good geographic range. This is not surprising given the international scope of the two authors' careers.

There is more. A chapter each is devoted to workshops, self-monitoring, teaching journals, peer observation, teaching portfolios and so on, some of them expansions of the brief suggestions made in earlier chapters. Teachers should find this book very readable and full of suggestions which they can implement without disruption to the rest of their busy lives.

A course for teachers

Lindsay and Knight's recent *Learning and teaching English: a course for teachers* gives a reasonably comprehensive coverage of the basics of language teaching. Like many ELT book writers, the authors have worked internationally as language teachers and as teacher trainers in Britain, Europe

and Asia. The book's purpose as a course book rather than as a reference for current teachers is reflected in its questions, its tasks and some of its content.

The first chapter makes general points about the process of teaching and learning a language. At 13 pages this coverage is necessarily fairly brief. Chapter 2, "Teaching methods and ideas", deals with the subject historically, moving from grammar-translation to task-based learning. I was interested to notice that by using the present tense to describe the former, the authors tacitly acknowledge that it is still in vogue in some countries. By contrast the Direct Method is firmly presented in the past tense. Most of chapter 3 (language) describes the English language for teachers.

The remaining six chapters (almost half the book) deal with the four skills and with planning (Chapter 8) and assessment and evaluation (Chapter 9). Teaching vocabulary is integrated into the other chapters. Finally, there is a section of case studies in which teachers reflect on their experiences. These would be an important resource for the trainer.

The book comes with an audio CD which has a few samples of spoken English to supplement activities in the book and a series of spoken case studies. We are told that in the latter "the teachers are represented by voice actors" (p. 133) and I suspect that the samples are also by them. This is my only criticism of the disc. There is no shortage of people in a teacher training group who can read a script (which is provided in print forming any case). Surely the advantage of having audio material is for authenticity? It seemed especially strange, for instance, to hear a British actor reading the 'voice' of an Italian teacher.

The book and CD are recommended for courses where the beginner teachers enjoy visual input and plenty of examples. The traditional index is replaced by a glossary in which there is a reference to one page each, where the word appears in bold.

Materials for language teaching

Apart from the teacher, materials are probably the most visible determiner of classroom mood. If language learners find the materials appealing, then their motivation to learn is increased. In *Materials evaluation and design for language teaching* McGrath does two things. He offers a book that is practical enough to satisfy teachers in a hurry, while also supporting all his examples with a theoretical base. He does this in ten chapters and 310 pages. The book belongs to a series advertised as offering "advanced introductions to ... areas of study in contemporary Applied Linguistics".

McGrath's definition of 'materials' includes everything that is text based, whether specifically designed for the classroom or brought in from authentic sources. A number of implicit teacher questions are answered, such as "How do I choose a course book?", "What adaptation can I make to them?" and "What new ideas are there for making supplementary materials?"

The first three chapters will be of most interest to those who have responsibility for ordering text books. After a short first chapter encouraging a systematic approach, McGrath moves on to distinguish between "first-glance evaluation" in Chapter 2 and "close evaluation" in Chapter 3. In my experience, one of the hardest tasks in selecting and evaluating textbooks is deciding on the evaluation criteria. Ideally, of course, these should relate to a specific class but, as McGrath notes, having to order text books a long time ahead of meeting the class, means this is not always possible.

For most classroom teachers the choices start when the course book has been selected and decisions are made about adapting them (Chapter 4) and about designing supplementary worksheets (Chapter 5). According to the author, the two main reasons for adapting a book are to suit the context and (this one was a surprise) because of deficiencies in the book such as language mistakes and dated examples. Perhaps as guidelines for pre-purchase evaluation become more widely available, this second reason will be reduced. In Chapter 5 I turned to the section on devising one's own material, since that is what many so many language teachers enjoy doing, and not only for the reasons listed above. McGrath has helpful suggestions for the worksheet that focuses on grammar or on vocabulary but his definition of a worksheet as something that could "consist of photocopied exercises" (p. 93) seemed too broad to me.

About a fifth of the book is taken up with samples from textbooks and from evaluations of them. As the list of references shows, although there is no shortage of articles on the topic, whole books devoted to it have been rarer. In some ways this is a cumulative book, drawing on these earlier sources by major publishers. Not surprisingly, the book has already been reprinted once.

Supervising language teachers

Finally there is a new book from that prolific and effective writer and speaker, Kathy Bailey. Although based in Monterey she draws on experience of teacher education in many parts of the world. Unlike the other books reviewed here, this one is directed at the educator rather than the classroom teacher, and as can be imagined from the thirteen chapters and 384 pages, this is no light treatment of the topic. Her systematic approach involves referencing extensively from the field.

In selecting highlights for this review, I decided to use the index as my starting point to look for topics that particularly interested me. First I had to move past fascinating diversions. Who but an optimistic author would add the word 'wholeheartedness' to the index? Back on track, a search for 'resistance' led me to nine entries, the longest of these in Chapter 13. What interested me in particular were ways of working with teachers who resist suggestions for improvement. Her message reinforced experience. Apparently we should "not be discouraged by initial reluctance ... [or be] too encouraged by initial enthusiasm" (p. 278). It reminded me of many conversations with fellow trainers who can easily adopt one of these stances. The proof of whether or not suggestions have been accepted comes later.

I was particularly interested to read what Bailey had to say about *Supervising non-native speaking teachers* (Chapter 14). Her words "If you already speak the local... language" (p. 297) seemed to highlight something important. How many of us who have worked with teachers for whom English is a second language, can discuss their concerns with them in their own language? What difference would it make to their acceptance of our suggestions if we could?

As always, searching an index leads to some terms one has never heard of. In my case these included 'fluid response instrument', 'negative transportation', and SMIL, for all of whose meanings I turned out to have guessed wrongly. Let me leave some fun for the reader in this warmly recommended book.

Conclusion

Occasionally someone will suggest that we must have said and written all there is to know on the topic of language teaching. These five titles suggest that there is still plenty of ideas to be shared around the profession.

Titles in order of the reviews

Chamot, A.U., Barnhardt, S., El-Dinary, P.B. and Robbins, Jill. (1999). *The learning strategies handbook*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman.

Richards, Jack C. and Farrell, Thomas S. C. (2005). *Professional development for language teachers: Strategies for teacher learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lindsay, Cora and Knight, Paul (2006). *Learning and teaching English: a course for teachers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McGrath, Ian (2002). *Materials evaluation and design for language teaching*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Bailey, Kathleen (2006). *Language teacher supervision: a case-based approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Reference

O'Malley, J. M. and Chamot, A.U. (1990) *Learning strategies in second language acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Reviewed by Marilyn Lewis, The University of Auckland.