
Book Reviews

Bridge to the Classroom: ESL Cases for Teacher Exploration Volume 1, Bridge to the Classroom: Elementary School

Joy Egbert

Waldorf, MD: TESOL, 2005, 210 pages

Volume 2, Bridge to the Classroom: Secondary School

Joy Egbert

Waldorf, MD: TESOL, 2005, 210 pages

Volume 3, Bridge to the Classroom: Adult Contexts

Joy Egbert and Gina Mikel Petrie

Waldorf, MD: TESOL, 2005, 212 pages

Bridge to the Classroom: Teacher's Guide for Vols. 1-2

Joy Egbert

Waldorf, MD: TESOL, 66 pages

Bridge to the Classroom: Teacher's Guide for Vol. 3

Joy Egbert and Gina Mikel Petrie

Waldorf, MD: TESOL, 64 pages

In *The Case for Cases in Teacher Education*, Kay Merseth (1991) recommends the use of case studies because they develop students' skills in analytical thinking, written and oral expression, and conceptual understanding. Case studies can also help students to be able connect theory to practice, an oft-cited troubling weakness of teacher education. An additional advantage for those using case studies is that the role of the teacher educator becomes that of a facilitator rather than a provider of knowledge (Sudzina, 2000). As a TESOL teacher educator, I agree with Merseth and with Sudzina and therefore have attempted to locate appropriate case studies for the courses I teach. From time to time, I have found examples of case studies in the professional literature, usually in the form of scenarios. However, these studies were neither systematic in their investigations of issues in TESOL, nor formally organized for classroom use. So I was pleased to see that a compilation of case studies had been published by TESOL Publications. This new, user-friendly, and serviceable series of books entitled *Bridge to the Classroom: ESL Cases for Teacher Exploration* consists of five books: three spiral-bound texts for TESOL students and two accompanying teacher educator guides. The three spiral-bound volumes target future ESL teachers at the elementary, secondary, and adult levels. Volume 1 of the teacher's guide combines the elementary- and secondary-school levels, and Volume 2 targets teacher educators who instruct teachers of adult English-language learners. All five

volumes are written by Joy Egbert, with Gina Mikel Petrie as co-author of the Volume 3 student and teacher books for adult contexts. At approximately 210 pages, the student books are a manageable length, and the teacher educator guides run to about 65 pages. Each of the five volumes is written in a similar format, making them easy to follow and use.

Student Books

Volumes 1 to 3 of the student books are dedicated to presenting 14 case studies one to three pages in length. Authors Egbert and Petrie state that the cases come from real situations encountered either by the authors themselves or by their colleagues in the TESOL field. Case topics presented in the elementary- and secondary-level student books are essentially the same, although in the volume that targets adult-level teachers, cases are slightly modified to meet more appropriately the differing needs of adult English-language learners. After each case study is presented and one focus question is asked, the remainder of each chapter is clearly and simply laid out and divided into five phases, all with follow-up discussion questions. 1. "Identifying the issues" asks the same five questions across all case studies; 2. "Consider all perspectives" provides the same four questions across all studies; 3. "Identify relevant professional knowledge" consists of anywhere from four to eight questions; 4. "Consider possible actions and consequences" comprises three to five questions. Last, step 5, "Closure," consists of four to six questions. Each volume also has a chapter entitled "Create Your Own Case." This provides users with the opportunity to brainstorm a situation not already investigated in preceding cases, which helps make the book more contextually relevant to teacher educators' and students' own teaching situations. An additional feature is the extensive "Case Resources" section, which provides readers with 20 pages of book, journal, and Web site sources. This section is divided into 30 topics related to teaching and learning English.

Teacher Guides

In the two teacher guides, each of the 14 cases is viewed from the teacher educator's perspective. At the beginning there is a handy chart with four columns: the case number, the title of the case study, the prominent concepts, and the TESOL issues relevant to each case. Each case study is then broken down as in the student book, except that instead of white space reserved for students' notes or responses, an abundance of information is provided for teacher educators to assist them in effectively using and exploiting the cases with their students. For example, "Identify the issues" is broken down into a listing of (a) major issues, (b) others issues, and (c) suggested readings pertaining to the case. "Discuss the issues" is followed by two sections stating positive and negative aspects of the case situation, and a third section that lists additional questions. Next are two sections, "Consider all perspectives" and "Identify relevant professional knowledge." The "Consider pos-

sible actions and consequences” section shows a chart with two columns, one listing actions and the other consequences for the case. In each of the cases, the “Closure questions” section has two questions asking readers to summarize their analysis of the case. If needed or desired, this section supplies additional questions for reflection. And following “Closure questions” a list of suggested activities to explore the issues further is presented. These activities have a wide range in order to satisfy the varied needs of learners and teachers.

The volumes offered in *Bridge to the Classroom: ESL Cases for Teacher Exploration* could be used as required texts for an introductory course in a TESOL program centering on any of the three focal teaching levels: elementary, high school, or adult. The wide variety of TESOL concepts (numbering roughly 35) and issues (numbering roughly 75) addressed in each book in the series has the potential to cover, at least superficially, the broad spectrum of linguistic and pedagogical knowledge needed by TESOL teachers. On the other hand, if desired, teacher educators might wish to use only a limited number of case studies in the series as a supplement to other course materials. For example, for a course on TESOL assessment, case study number 12 entitled “A Process of Evaluation” could be effectively implemented whereas in a course where culture is the main focus, case studies number 4 “Culture Clash” and 5 “Who Am I?” would be valuable.

Another positive aspect of the series lies not so much in its content as in its page layout: there is plenty of white space in the margins for students to make copious notes and write questions or reactions for future discussion, thereby eliminating the need for them to keep separate notebooks.

One possible drawback of the series is that for students and possibly for teacher educators, the large number of concepts and issues assigned to each case study may create initial confusion; some contain as many as five concepts and eight issues. To remedy this, the authors could have identified one central issue and concept, leaving the others as secondary. This would be especially helpful when working with preservice teachers with no experience in the ESL classroom.

Another minor criticism, essentially cosmetic in nature, relates to the use of large plastic looped coil bindings on the student volumes. Although this form of binding makes it simple to open each page fully, if more than one volume is being used, the spiral bindings easily become tangled with one another. But this is clearly a minor annoyance compared with the many positive, unique features of the series.

Although these texts are directed at teacher educators and students of teaching ESL, they could with some heavy modification be used in an EFL teaching context too. What distinguishes the series and makes it potentially useful to TEFL educators is its case study structure, along with the guidelines and steps for using case studies in an English-language teaching education

situation, whether it be TESL or TEFL. Given that new general texts for TESOL teacher education courses are currently a dime a dozen, the *Bridge to the Classroom: ESL Cases for Teacher Exploration* series is a refreshing approach to an otherwise pedestrian text model.

Lisa Morgan

References

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- Sudzina, M. (2000). Innovative resources and strategies for applying cases to teacher education. In H. Klein (Ed.), *Complex demands on teaching require innovation*. Madison, WI: Omni Press.

The Reviewer

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Oxford Basics: Activities Using Resources

Heather Westrup and Joanna Baker

Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005, 71 pages

According to Oxford, the *Basics Series* is written for two audiences: teachers who are looking for new ideas using limited resources and new ESL/EFL teachers. Currently the series contains nine other titles.

A mere 71 pages, *Oxford Basics: Activities Using Resources* is filled with 30 practical, creative activities that make use of resources that are readily available: the board, flash cards, posters, small cards, objects in the classroom, objects brought from outside the classroom, the teacher, and the learners themselves. The introduction includes guidelines for simple storage of materials so that they are readily accessible and tips on how to use and prepare each resource. For example, *small cards* refers to those innumerable small, uniform pieces of paper used for dominoes, matching games, and so forth. The authors suggest using light cardboard cut in 5x8-inch pieces with pictures or words either glued or drawn on them. They also suggest having learners help prepare the cards (learners as resource), thus creating a communicative classroom task. The three activities using the teacher as a resource involve storytelling or inviting learners to ask the teacher personal questions.

Each activity is outlined in two pages, presenting target language, resources required, preparation (if any), timing guide, procedure for the activity, and variations. Language is understood in a flexible way; for example, in #16 language refers to fluency practice of any previously learned language. Each activity can be adapted to varied levels and varied class sizes, although most are best for lower-level learners in small classes. All focus on visual learning. In the authors' opinion, visual resources are important in the classroom: "Seeing and touching an object or a picture of an object is more memorable

than just hearing or reading a word" (p. 1). Most activities have an illustration, which will appeal to visual teachers. All activities are well designed, making good use of class time by keeping students actively learning and practicing constructively. None is silly, contrived, or undignified.

Many of the activities are for reviewing vocabulary or language already learned, focusing on either accuracy or fluency. One, "Introducing and Practising Language," gives a few practical suggestions for teaching new language functions—in this case making, accepting, and refusing invitations—but the technique will be well known to all experienced teachers. However, although a number of activities will be somewhat familiar to experienced teachers, many have varied creative twists that make them refreshing. For example, the unit on *Mind Maps* shows a neat and orderly method rather than the often messy spiderweb result that sprawls over boards. Another on dominoes shows how to make phrasal verb dominoes and collocation dominoes.

One interesting activity, "Stories from words" (#8), uses flash cards to practice making sentences into a story. Before class, the teacher prepares the flash cards, each with a word for the story. The teacher shows the first 10 words for the story one by one for a few seconds each. Learners do not copy the words; they try to remember them and write the sentence after seeing all the cards. The second challenge follows the same sequence, and so on. To make the activity more challenging, the cards could be shown out of order. For more excitement, a combination of word cards and picture cards could be used. Variations include substituting other words in the same story or leaving out a word in each sentence and asking learners to supply their own.

Experienced teachers will find most of these activities familiar or obvious; moreover, teachers of EAP and advanced-level adults will find few useful new ideas. However, new teachers, anxious teachers, teachers trying to avoid the label *boring*, and teachers lacking refined organizational skills will all find the book indispensable. Thirty usable, creative, easy-to-follow ideas under one cover is a tempting purchase. How often have you half remembered a good idea and then were unable to find it? How often do you decide at the last minute that you need a tried-and-true activity to reinforce language learned the day before? You will find something valuable in this book, which is thin and colorful, a little longer and wider than others of its ilk, and easily locatable in your bag of tricks.

Ellen Pilon

The Reviewer

Ellen Pilon is currently a freelance ESL teacher in Halifax, NS. Representing TESL NS, she is actively involved with TESL New Brunswick in co-planning the TESL Canada 2008 Conference.

Teaching and Learning Vocabulary: Bringing Scientific Research to Practice

Elfrieda H. Hiebert and Michael L. Kamil (Eds.)

Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2005, 273 pages

Teaching and Learning Vocabulary: Bringing Research to Practice (TLV) is aimed at researchers and graduate students whose focus is on children learning to read in English as their first language. In fact the United States-based National Reading Panel whose investigations are largely the impetus for *TLV*, specifically excluded from its research database studies dealing with "foreign languages or non-English-speaking groups, or ... special populations, including second-language learners" (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000, pp. 4-16). A quick scan through the references confirms that the same focus is evident in *TLV*: the major TESL publications and vocabulary researchers are largely overlooked. This gap aside, there is a great deal of valuable research and insight, although most readers of this journal will find that it all needs to be considered through the lens of an ESL environment.

Interestingly, the findings and recommendations of the various authors largely mirror much recent L2 vocabulary literature (Nation, 2001; Folse, 2004). For example, like Nation and Folse, *TLV* argues strongly that direct instruction in vocabulary is needed. Following Zeno, Ivens, Millard, and Duvvuri (1995), it identifies a core set of 5,586 unique word forms that establish the basis for further reading and vocabulary development: almost the same 2,000 high-frequency word families promoted in the L2 literature (Nation). Similarly, it identifies 95% as a vocabulary knowledge threshold below which independent reading is too difficult.

The structure of the book, with each chapter written by separate researchers, leads to some overlap and redundancy. Often, however, this is helpful in reinforcing and recontextualizing the information. Unfortunately, inconsistencies such as widely different estimates of vocabulary sizes do remain and are sometimes difficult to reconcile. Part of the problem is that although many word counts and frequencies are discussed, it is sometimes unclear what is being counted. *Word* is used variously to mean individual word forms (e.g., run and runs = 2 words) and word families (e.g., run, runs, ran, running, and runner = 1 word family), and it is not always clear which meaning is intended. Despite this, the text is generally precise and easy to read.

The first section sets out the empirical and theoretical basis for the rest of the volume: why vocabulary is important for success in reading, why it needs to be taught directly, and why students need to read extensively. The second section then goes into how this should be realized in the classroom. In particular, the chapter by Stahl provides many techniques that could be used

with any ESL class. The third section focuses on which words to teach. This is probably the part of the book with the least direct applicability to ESL contexts, although the theoretical basis behind it remains pertinent: an emphasis on the *Goldilocks* words: those that are not too frequent, and not too rare, but just right.

In short, *TLV* is not the kind of book that belongs on every ESL teacher's bookshelf, but it does fill a gap in the literature and does so with much scholarship and perspicuity.

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Brett Reynolds

The Reviewer

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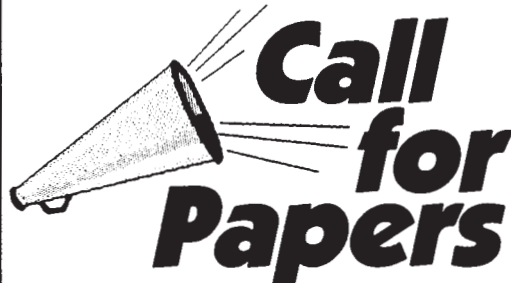
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