
Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

Creating Meaning: Advanced Reading and Writing

Hannah Friesen and Kathy Block

Oxford University Press, Toronto ON, 2000

266 Pages, ISBN: 0-19-541401-2

Friesen and Block have given us a reader with a real difference! *Creating Meaning* is a thoughtfully prepared, well-integrated text of special value for learners who need to walk the bridge between ESL/EFL and academic preparation. What makes it especially appealing is its Canadian content, which is also of high interest and current relevance. The topics are diverse, ranging from family and culture, to emotional intelligence, to people who make a difference. All are authentic readings from a variety of credible sources.

The structure of the text integrates readings with skill development exercises and various types of writing tasks. Contemporary learning theory is neatly embedded in each chapter, which begins with a statement of the objectives of the chapter, an introduction, and pre-reading exercises that ask the learner to state what he or she already knows about the topic. Readings contain information that would be of interest to most Canadians, not just to ESL learners. At the same time, topics have been carefully chosen to be sensitive to both the kinds of information the immigrant learner wants to know, and that information will provide him or her with good cultural capital in the learning community.

The assignments that follow each reading are not limited to vocabulary and comprehension checks, but also include critical analysis of the topic that necessitates a deeper reflection on the reading and what it means to the learner's life and the life of the broader society.

Traditional reading skills such as skimming and finding the main idea are accompanied by a variety of writing skill development exercises such as summarizing, sentence structure, paragraph development, preparing an outline, writing an essay, the thesis statement, and taking notes. Vocabulary exercises teach vocabulary in context and include ample work with synonyms, suffixes, and prefixes.

This is not a book for learners in the regular LINC programs. The vocabulary and tasks are challenging, but it is perfect for high school and university work with immigrant and international students. (And the CLBA Level 4s would probably like it too, with sufficient support from their teachers.)

This book will no doubt be a welcome addition to many a school's choice of texts.

Virginia Sauvé

The Reviewer

Virginia Sauvé is an adult educator currently working as a consultant doing mostly workplace education and training in Edmonton, Alberta. She is also the author of the *Voices and Visions* series for teachers published by Oxford University Press.

Am I Teaching Well? Self-Evaluation Strategies for Effective Teachers

Vesna Nikolic and Hanna Cabaj

Pippin Publishing, Toronto, ON, 2000

264 pages, ISBN: 0-88751-087-6

Am I Teaching Well? is a professional development guide for teachers in any subject area, not just ESL/EFL, although Nikolic and Cabaj plainly have considerable experience and expertise in that particular domain, and certain of their chapters (e.g., 7, 9) do focus particularly on language teaching. The authors' generalized outlook strikes me as important, as does their central and oft-repeated premise that teaching (all teaching) is a worthy professional activity deserving of the same kind of high, self-governed professional standards as any other profession. For many ESL/EFL instructors, the refreshingly confident professionalism encouraged by the book—reflecting the self-critical but also committed and optimistic atmosphere of the Teacher Study Groups that are beginning to be established here and there across North America—may come as a welcome change from the isolation and discouragement that often seem to be the teacher's lot. Consequently, ESL or EFL educators who decide to work with some or all of these self-study projects will immediately benefit from the stimulating and challenging tone of the volume, even before they undertake their first self-study venture. Quite apart from the specific exercises and activities that it presents, *Am I Teaching well?* is a rousing call to professional arms, and as such it is both timely and appropriate.

This book is far more than a manifesto, as valuable as that aspect may be: it also offers an adaptable scheme for effective self-study (I prefer this term to *self-evaluation*, which the authors mainly use) that demonstrates considerable wisdom and practical insight. Although theoretical underpinnings for each section are always provided, the material is above all praxis-oriented, with a concrete focus. This is clearly a volume *by* teachers *for* teachers, which, of course, is yet another way the authors convincingly assert the maturity of our profession.

After a general introduction to the professional usefulness of conscientious and accurate self-study, the first chapter presents a cyclical model for the professional development process: Raising awareness, Establishing a systematic process of self-observation, Identifying strengths and weaknesses, Planning a course of action, Ensuring systematic observation and analysis of findings, and Modifying teaching practice—leading once more to renewed Raising awareness, and so on. Then, in support of this process, eight powerful tools are described in some detail: Action Research, Self-Reporting, Self-Observation (Audio- or Videorecording), Professional Portfolios, Role Reversal (Teachers as Learners), Peer Observation, Professional Development Plans, and Group Professional Development Projects. It is suggested that teachers may well choose to use just one of these tools, although the authors suggest that “a ‘combination’ approach will be most effective” (p. 15). The 15 chapters that follow are devoted to a comprehensive range of professional development foci from lesson planning to testing, and from participation in the professional community to teacher and student motivation and attitude.

Although their clear preference is for individual self-study, Nikolic and Cabaj recognize that “many administrators now encourage teachers to combine formal [i.e., supervisory] and self-evaluation,” commenting that such a combination may seem “contradictory” (p. 19). This is a sensitive and complex issue, but one that must be addressed, and I believe that it might fruitfully have received more attention in this otherwise very good book. For example, TESL Ontario’s current implementation of the TESL Canada national certification guidelines for adult ESL teachers includes a highly appropriate element of individual self-reporting, but it also entails an external and therefore supervisory-type evaluation of experience and credentials. Surely questions about the validity of supervisory evaluation depend not so much on the abstract nature of supervisory evaluation per se as on the extent to which individual teachers—as members of the department, school, or professional association in the context of which a given evaluation is to be made—have a say in creating and therefore owning the criteria that will be used and how they will be applied. A book like *Am I Teaching Well?* may in fact be expected to have a positive influence in this respect by providing a strong basis for discussions on how a process of disciplined and critical self-study can be included as a respected element of evaluation alongside supervisory evaluation, with no sense of being contradictory. Properly designed, such a combination should yield not only the powerful evaluation potential of triangulation (a qualitative research technique of comparing information from multiple sources), but also the broad public recognition that is an explicit goal of the TESL certification process.

Still, such cavils aside, *Am I Teaching Well?* is an extremely practical and thought-provoking volume. I anticipate that it will play a valuable role either as a personal guide for individual teachers or as a workbook for groups in teacher education courses. The numerous reproducible activity sheets are well thought out, and both the theoretical structure and the organization of the book are solidly convincing. Moreover, the high professional ideals set out by Nikolic and Cabaj will be music to the ears of beginning or experienced teachers everywhere.

John Sivell

The Reviewer

John Sivell is a professor of applied language studies at Brock University (St. Catharines, Ontario), where he offers courses chiefly in the TESL Program at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy, Second Edition

H. Douglas Brown

Addison Wesley Longman, a Pearson Education Company, New York, 2001
480 pages, ISBN: 013 3282201

What distinguishes *Teaching by Principles* from most other TESL textbooks is its focus, as the title suggests, on the *principles* underlying language teaching. There is a dazzling array of materials and techniques about which language teachers must make decisions. It is to principles of language teaching and learning that we, novice and experienced teacher alike, should turn when faced with important choices. Brown's principles offer excellent focal points for making these choices.

The changes made in this second edition, by and large, strengthen this already solid text. Brown has reordered the chapters so that methodology is discussed before principles. Thus students become familiar with some practices to which they can then apply the principles. Lesson planning and classroom management have been moved from the end of the text to the middle, befitting their importance; students involved in observations and practicum need this information early.

The four-part division of the first book was clumsy; the third section, for example, was too large and unwieldy. Brown now offers six well-balanced sections: Foundations, Contexts, Designing Sample Lessons, Teaching Language Skills, Assessing Language Skills, and Lifelong Learning. The single chapter on testing in the first edition was weak (although I do miss the information-rich title that served by itself as an important reminder: "Creating Interactive and Intrinsically Motivating Tests"). Testing in the new edi-

tion is presented as a separate section and is more thorough and much better organized. There is more detail on types of validity and good information on the theory of test construction.

The suggested readings that end each chapter have been updated and extended. In chapter 5 I like the inclusion of a Hungarian reference on intrinsic motivation: Dornyei, Z. and Csizér, K. (1998) "Ten Commandments for Motivating Language Learners: Results of an Empirical Study," *Language Teaching Research*, 2, 203-229. I would welcome more non-American, non-British sources. An excellent 12-page index replaces the three-page index of the earlier edition. The layout and printing of the new edition is of much better quality all around. All the charts are better designed, as are the headings and subheadings, which were haphazardly unparallel (physically and grammatically) in the first edition. I checked for two of my favorite charts, and they are still there: the Scope and Sequence chart in chapter 7 and the chart of Controlled, Semi-Controlled and Free Techniques in chapter 9. The new chart naming Micro-skills in Reading (chapter 8) looks useful. Also in chapter 8 Brown has replaced the objectionable (at least to me) term *Limited English Proficient* with the more positive *English Language Development* and has introduced the terms *BICS* and *CALP*.

The final chapter now has a section on collaboration, team teaching, peer coaching, and teacher support groups. Here Brown also addresses critical pedagogy and offers encouragement to engage in it. The CALL section has been expanded to include a wide variety of technologies available to language teachers and learners. Teaching multilevel classes now appears as an "adverse condition" in the chapter on classroom management.

Is there any more sobering way to determine how old your materials are than by the prices you assign to menus, buying cars, renting apartments, and so on? Happily, Brown has updated the menu prices in chapter 9: a hamburger that cost \$2.95 in the original edition now sells for \$4.95. The menu typeface and accompanying photograph, however, should have been updated as well.

One change puzzles me somewhat as it distances author from reader. In the original edition the topics for discussion at the end of each chapter were in a reader-friendly way addressed to the *reader* (What do you consider ...). They are now addressed to the "teacher/trainer" of the course (and include advice on whether the activity would work best as a group, individual, or whole-class activity). Because in our own particular TESL training course the text is used as a reference and the teacher trainees read it on their own, the original approach was preferable.

There are a few areas I consider to be weak. The chapter on teaching reading still has the uninspiring "Rainforests" selection. Although trainees can learn a lot by analyzing a problematic selection, I would like to see a

much better sample. As well, I am not sure why "Becoming a Proficient Writer: Guided Writing Exercise" ends the chapter on reading in both editions. Why isn't it part of the subsequent chapter on teaching writing?

In the chapter Form-Focused Instruction (formerly known as grammar), the verb tense section, in my view, should be extended. Trainees obsess about verb tenses and once he is talking about them, Brown should chart all 12 tenses as a reference. At the very least, as one of the end of chapter activities he should ask the reader to create or complete an English verb tense chart. The "deviant utterance" chart in chapter 20 seems confusing and overly ambitious in view of the split second teachers have in which to correct errors. (The term *deviant utterance* makes me shudder; I prefer *error*.)

This text is out on my desk at all times. I know better than to judge a book by its cover, but I must comment that I so enjoyed the artwork of the original edition that the cover of the second edition seems generic by comparison.

Additions I would welcome in the next revision include a chapter on the practicum, which is an important element in most TESL training courses, more acknowledgment of the non-native speaker of English as the English teacher, and a chart that organizes the basic terminology of teacher training meaningfully. Brown might consider a video to accompany his text. If the book is used in a context where access to classrooms is limited, then a video of a language class in session would provide a valuable (albeit second-hand) classroom experience.

The comments I make here are respectfully submitted. The new edition of *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* is, in my view, an excellent resource for a TESL program in teacher education and development.

Linda Steinman

The Reviewer

Linda Steinman teaches in the TESL Training programs offered by the English Language Institute at Seneca College in Toronto and is a doctoral candidate in second language education at OISE/University of Toronto.
