

REVIEW

Paula Kalaja, Vera Menezes and Ana Maria F. Barcelos (eds):
NARRATIVES OF LEARNING AND TEACHING EFL. Palgrave
Macmillan, 2008.

This book represents a diversity of research perspectives on English as a foreign language (EFL) narratives in three different continents (South America, Asia, and Europe). Fully aware of the complexity of the field, the editors adopt the metaphor of a *kaleidoscope* to capture the multi-layered and interactive nature of the processes implied in learning and teaching EFL. Each turn of the narrative kaleidoscope gives an insight on the intricacies of learning/teaching context. The conscious move from the 'learning as acquisition' to 'learning as participation' depicts a learner who actively deploys strategies and constructs hypotheses. It highlights an emotional and reflexive dimension of the teaching process, thus presenting participants who try to cope with or resist institutional frameworks. Teaching and learning identities contribute simultaneously to accounts of lived, personal, subjective experiences. The volume's introduction supplies an excellent conceptual map and a description of national EFL contexts in Japan, Finland, and Brazil. Although most contributors are EFL teachers, the book's organization manifests mostly an orientation towards research. The aim is to provide 'a glimpse of the unfolding perspectives and alternative views on narrativising learning and teaching EFL' (p. 232). The book's division into four sections reflects the means of data collection.

Part II on 'written narratives' focuses on language learning histories of Japanese and Brazilian university students learning English (Chapter 2 by Murphey and Carpenter and Chapter 3 by Barcelos) and describes the ideological divide between private and public EFL contexts in Brazil from a teacher's perspective (see especially Chapter 4 by Dutra and Mello and Chapter 5 by Miccoli). The chapters show how narrative inquiry presents an emic perspective on learning/teaching by disclosing personal beliefs, expectations, and strategies, as well as emotional responses to EFL experiences. Whereas Murphey and Carpenter argue for affective relationships between learners and teachers, engaging them in the construction of affinities and shared spaces, Barcelos locates the learners' frustrations with dominant EFL learning ideologies in Brazil and calls for political action towards better quality education which transforms EFL practice. Dutra and Melo, as well as Miccoli, stop short of demanding political transformation and suggest an inside-out change which is based on reflective teaching and less teacher-centred pedagogy.

Part III on 'self-narratives' engages in a reflexive analysis of the lived emotional struggles of teachers who face student resistance (Chapter 7 by Sakui and Cowie) and respond to other people's learning experiences (Chapter 6 by Karlsson). The focus here is on EFL contexts in Finland and Japan.

Narrative inquiry helps to reveal the tacit knowledge implied in both processes, yet Karlsson takes this further by linking teachers and students in a 'recycling' process of learning experiences, this way creating a 'kaleidoscopic picture of their learners and themselves, not a microscopic one' (p. 87). In Part III, on 'oral narratives', Cotterall (Chapter 8) applies narrative research to explore individual learners' management of evolving motivations over time. This is the key issue of a life history project by Murray in Japan (Chapter 9) which illustrates how English learners 'become members of a variety of communities of practice, both immediate and imagined' (p. 131). Identities in the making are examined by Block (in Chapter 10) and Chik and Benson (Chapter 11). Block stresses, in a story of an adult EFL learner in Spain, that identity work develops in close connection to immediate communities of practice, rather than in relation to the English language. He warns against 'overemphasising individual agency' (p. 143) and urges us to consider it as both 'constitutive of and constituted by social structure' (p. 143). The same point is illustrated by Chik and Benson's description of the destabilizing sense of identity in the case of a postgraduate student from Hong Kong who is being positioned as an EFL learner at a UK university.

Finally, the part of the book which deals with 'multimodal narratives' focuses on the use of photographs, drawings, and multi-modal resources to examine the role of EFL in Finnish teenagers' everyday lives (Chapter 12 by Nikula and Pitkänen-Huhta), beliefs about EFL teaching/learning among learners in Finland (Chapter 13 by Kalaja, Alanen, and Dufva), and EFL learning experiences in Brazil (Chapter 14 by Menezes). These chapters reveal how the identities of learner and language user 'get intertwined in [the] participants' stories' (p. 171) and agree on the cross-influences between learning activities inside and outside the classroom (p. 212). The accounts are viewed as multi-voiced meta-narratives. They are analysed within the variety of their meaning-making potentials and situated within particular socio-cultural contexts (p. 198).

The book is shaped both by a kaleidoscopic account of EFL experiences from multiple contexts (formal, informal, national) and a variety of disciplinary fields. The contributors in it draw on a wide range of theoretical constructs, including the philosophy of language and education, sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, social psychology, psychotherapy, etc., while insights from discourse analysis, literacy studies, cultural-historical analysis, critical pedagogy, action research, etc. evidence a poststructuralist approach to the analysis of language and language learning. The volume's contributors view language as inherently social and therefore consider learning from within a participant perspective of socialisation (pp. 170–172). The spotlight is 'from the student's perspective and within the context of the student's life' (p. 156). The use of learning histories, journals, diaries, field-notes, and semi-structured interviews underline the book's orientation to qualitative and ethnographic methods, while participant observation and collaborative research are used as strategies of triangulation. One can also note a distinction between analyses of narratives

(Chapters 2–5, 8–10, and 12–14) and narrative analysis (Chapters 6, 7, and 11). The volume's contributors differ in their use of narrative as a method: for some it is 'both the phenomenon and the method' (p. 85), while for others it is 'a form of representation rather than a mode of analysis' (p. 62). However, the chapters share the view that narratives provide participants with agency, situating experiences within time and space. Narratives are thus particularly valuable for the analysis of identities, since 'identities are discursively constructed through [them]' (p. 172).

Along with the socially oriented traditions on language and education (Martin-Jones and Heller 1996; Block 2003; Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004), the volume authors discuss identities rather than an identity, 'in part conditioned by social and cultural factors (including gender, nationality, ethnicity, class and language repertoire) and by the ways others see us [...], in part by individual agency and negotiated through ongoing narratives' (p. 156). Block (this volume) explains that these variables 'do not stand independently of one another in the larger general identity' (p. 143). Traces of identity (including previous educational experiences) interact in a language classroom (p. 106), which becomes a space where not only language is taught but also identities are negotiated, imposed, accepted, and resisted (Chapters 7, 10, and 11).

As the authors consider learning as a socio-historically situated phenomenon, and a language classroom as a culture (p. 65), they also stress how learners and teachers participate in, negotiate, and construct language and literacy practices. They develop shared ways of doing and making meaning and become members of real and imaginary communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1998; Murray this volume) which are not contained within the classroom but extend into family life, the consumption of literature, popular culture, and sports (Chapters 3, 8, 9, 11, and 14). While highlighting the multi-faceted role which communities of practice can play in language learning, Murray, however, stays 'unclear how educators can apply the notion to classroom and other learning contexts' (p. 138). It is worth noting here that Rogoff *et al.* (2002) developed the notion of a 'community of learners' from a different perspective and have successfully implemented it in a school setting.

Overall, the volume clearly illustrates the social turn in second language acquisition (SLA) (Block 2003), in which learners are seen as 'complex social beings' (Canagarajah 2004). It not only offers many practical considerations about EFL teaching and learning, but also discloses some dominant and tacit language learning ideologies. As a collection of narratives, it addresses the 'urgent need for accounts from inside' (Baynham and de Fina 2005), for instance, by dispelling myths of 'passive' Japanese learners, by bridging the EFL gap between private and public schools in Brazil, by validating the role of informal and incidental learning across the three continents, and ultimately by depicting autonomous learners and reflective teachers, as well as providing understandings of the dynamic nature of their socio-historical contexts.

The volume acknowledges the fragmented, partial, and situated nature of any interpretation of social phenomena. It argues for a three-dimensional

perspective of narrative inquiry, made up by temporality, human agency, and place (p. 88). Although most authors link participants' experiences to larger social patterns, the aspect of socio-historical and discursive embeddedness could have been explored more explicitly by addressing indexicalities of peer cultures, institutional, and societal discourses and by looking at experiences as critical resources for social identification (Norton and Toohey 2004; Blommaert 2005; Bartlett 2007). The view that educational sites are 'power-laden' (Canagarajah 2004: 117) helps us understand teacher/learner identities better. Language learning needs to be viewed as constituted and constrained by relationships of dominance, as language counts as 'a set of unequally distributed resources' (Heller 2007: 2).

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