

BOOK REVIEWS

Tochon, François V. & Druc, Isabelle C. (1992). *Oral et intégration des discours*. Sherbrooke: Université de Sherbrooke, Editions du CRP, 206 pp., \$20.00 (softcover).

The perennial problem familiar to all teacher educators is students' perception of a dichotomy between the theory and practice of education. Faced with the daunting task of coping with the classroom situation for the first time, the inexperienced student-teacher is understandably more concerned with the *how* rather than the *why* of teaching strategies. Repeated pleas for *relevance* serve to emphasize the inability to connect the content of lecture courses to the felt needs experienced in coming to terms with the day-to-day problems in the classroom. The dilemma created by this situation gives rise to the recurring search for a model of course structure which will make explicit the essential interrelationship between theory and practice. This book is the outcome of one attempt to find a solution to the problem.

The experiment was carried out with 24 students in the first year of a B.Ed. program in the University of Sherbrooke, and specifically, within the context of a course on the teaching of oral communication to pupils at infant and primary levels. In addition to their academic courses, the students engaged in teaching practice one day each week throughout the year. Instead of dealing theoretically with problems which confront student-teachers in their initial experiences in the classroom, the students were cast in the role of researchers. They were mandated to seek the solution to some of their problems by interviewing experienced teachers to establish their views on specific themes relevant to the students' preoccupations. Another facet of the experiment involved the students being interviewed to explore their learning experienced in the context of teaching practice. Finally, the students were required to prepare original unit plans for teaching practice and, where possible, to incorporate these

units into their classwork. Both in interviewing teachers and drawing up unit plans, students could choose to work individually or in groups of two or three. The experiment also included other elements referred to in the Introduction but not discussed subsequently.

The book comprises three parts. The first three chapters of Part I deal with the theoretical bases of a course in the teaching of oral communication and are a rich reference source of research theories and findings. The welcome development of the qualitative nature of recent research in the area of oral communication is highlighted in chapter 1 and the implications of this are elaborated. The inclusion of sociolinguistic variables serve to underscore the fact that the learning and teaching do not take place in a vacuum. The young child's progress in language development is embedded in a social context ("la situation sociale est le plus fort déterminant des comportements oraux," p. 19). Meaning, too, is shaped by social reality. Generally, the school is the first major socializing agency with which the child becomes familiar outside his or her immediate family circle. The classroom must also be recognized as a social situation and the interchange within it must, as far as possible, involve the child in activities that originate in his or her experiences. A classroom cut off from the child's world outside the school can result in learning taking place in an artificial context. Bridges must constantly be built between the two worlds of the child, and the oral communication lesson can be the ideal means of doing so ("C'est souvent le seul moment où les événements extrascolaires sont considérés comme pertinents à l'école," p. 24). The question formulated at the end of chapter 1 reflects an acute awareness of the importance of the child's reality in his or her development as learner and communicator. It also implies a philosophy of approach which can but enrich a course in the preservice education of teachers ("Comment aider les enfants à se développer comme apprenants et communicateurs sans couper la réalité du monde, des expériences et du jugement personnel dans lesquels toute implication véritable prend sa source?" p. 28).

This question reappears in different forms throughout the book — at times quite explicitly as in chapter 2 ("l'enseignant ou l'enseignante doit mettre les connaissances à la portée des enfants en les transformant en

termes de leur vécu," p. 35). Another recurring theme emerges in the chapter: the recognition of the central importance of the classroom situation and of the fluidity of that situation based as it is on human interchange. The theme informs this chapter on planning teaching units. The theory is carefully elaborated and well documented. However, no dogmatic stance is taken as to the method to be adopted. A variety of possible approaches is presented and explored. It is stressed that because of the nature of the pedagogical encounter the best laid plans may not work ("les interactions pédagogiques entraînent des modifications susceptibles de désorganiser la leçon la mieux préparée," p. 29). In these circumstances, theory yields to practice; plans must be adapted to suit the classroom context — a process which can pose great difficulty for the student-teacher.

Similarly, in chapter 3 it is emphasized that evaluation, too, must serve the needs of the classroom situation ("il ne faudrait pas prendre l'évaluation comme un but en soi. L'évaluation est au service de la didactique et non le contraire," p. 43). Distinctions are drawn between various forms of evaluation and useful source references are given. Most importantly, evaluation is seen as a means of helping the teacher to reflect on practice and on helping the child to advance in learning. The chapter includes extracts from interviews with experienced teachers on problems they encounter in evaluation. This section has a rather intrusive effect and causes a certain discontinuity. Had an analysis of the interviews been included, the section might have been more happily integrated within the conceptual framework of the chapter. However, a conscious decision was made not to do so ("Nous nous gardons de les interpréter: le lecteur ou la lectrice se fera son opinion," p. 52).

The final two chapters of Part I reflect one of the innovative aspects of the experiment — the students' learning experiences during their teaching practice become the subject of study. In chapter 3 their development of cognitive teaching strategies is explored ("Quelles sont les stratégies cognitives d'enseignement qu'utilisent les stagiaires pour favoriser l'oral?" p. 73). It is shown that the student teachers spontaneously developed interrelated and complementary strategies though they were not

yet familiar with the theoretical bases of these strategies. It is interesting to note that the interviewing process appears to have helped the students to reflect on their teaching practice and to analyze their experience. This chapter is very finely crafted and encapsulates the elements of the larger experiment — theory, practice, research, reflection, integration. The final chapter in Part I examines another aspect of the student teachers' learning experience — their management of children with different needs in the same class. Not unexpectedly, student teachers at this level found it difficult and, in some cases, impossible to cope with the problem. However, it would seem that the students' increasing realization of pupil differences led to an awareness of the individuality of each child which resulted in the adoption of coping strategies rooted in the human elements in the classroom situation ("[Les stratégies] lient le cognitif et l'affectif en indexant les thèmes abordés, la matière, au vécu des enfants, grâce à une connaissance progressivement approfondie de leur individualité," p. 89).

Parts II and III of the book further reflect innovative features of the experiment. In Part II the authors present extracts from students' interviews with experienced teachers on themes such as engaging pupils' attention, the effect of shyness on pupils' performance, stimulating pupils' interest and motivation, and evaluation of oral communication. The students' commentaries on their findings are included and understandably, these vary both in length and in depth. This is true also of the students' commentaries on their unit plans for teaching practice reproduced in Part III. However, bearing in mind that the students were in the first year of their program, a descriptive rather than an analytical approach is to be expected.

The three parts of the book do not cohere very satisfactorily. This is partly due to the difference in presentation between Part I and the other two sections and partly to the fact that the book seems to target a disparate readership. Teacher educators, who will undoubtedly be part of that readership, will be disappointed by the lack of any critical reflection on the experiment as a whole. An overall evaluation of the new model of course would considerably enrich the book. Without it, there is a sense of unfinished business. Unfortunately, too, the book contains some minor,

though irritating, infelicities which could have been avoided by more careful editing. For example, the context of the experiment is given in the Introduction and it is then replicated unnecessarily on page 72 and again on page 82. Chapter 4 is referred to, strangely, as an "article" on page 78. Again, the reference to chapter 7 in the Afterword should correctly be to chapter 6.

Overall, however, this book is a welcome contribution to the literature on teacher education. It reflects a deep sense of commitment to the betterment of course structure and the course to break new ground in the search for ways of responding more adequately to student-teachers' needs and concerns. It should certainly act as a stimulus to others to seek course models which make explicit to students the importance of theory for practice and the importance of practice as a mode of reflection on theory. In that context, this book will strike a responsive cord in all those involved in preservice teacher education.

Mary P. Wall
University College
Cork, Ireland