

BOOK REVIEW

Review of *Novice Language Teachers: Insights and perspectives for the first year*, edited by Thomas S. C. Farrell (2008). London: Equinox Publishing Ltd. 173 pp. ISBN-13: 978-84553-402-8 (paperback); ISBN-13: 978-84553-403-5 (hardback).

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A teacher's work is very demanding, with complicated educational issues and practical demands of classroom teaching to be handled. Reconciling personal ideals, performance standards, practicalities and wider educational concerns can be overwhelming (Pollard, 2008). These difficulties are experienced even more by beginning teachers. First-year teachers always find themselves in a paradoxical situation – they are expected to demonstrate abilities that they do not necessarily yet have, and what is more, the work of teaching itself, being “complex, uncertain and full of dilemmas”, sharpens the paradox (Feiman-Nemser 2001). Because of these the first year is crucial and at the same time problematic (Wang, Odell and Schwillie 2008). Indeed, the initial year of employment has been recognised as an “important segment of a beginning teacher's career” (McCormack & Thomas 2003: 125) and has also attracted much academic research.

While the first year of teaching has been well documented in general education, not many studies have been done in the area of second language education (Farrell 2008). At the same time, scholars (e.g. Richards and Pennington; Tarone and Allwright, as cited in Farrell, 2008) have suggested a gap between the academic course contents in language teacher preparation programmes and the real conditions that new teachers are faced with in the language classroom in their first year. It is therefore essential for teacher educators to understand the actual experiences of first-year second language teachers in order to design teacher training programmes that would better prepare the coming generations of teachers, particularly their transition to employment. Novice language teachers: insights and perspectives

for the first year is edited for this very reason. It attempts to fill the gap in second language education literature mentioned above by “examining the various challenges and influences novices second language teachers in a variety of different contexts had to navigate when teaching during their first year” (Farrell 2008: 2). For use in this collection, the editor, Thomas S. C. Farrell, defined ‘the first year’ as the period beyond practicum when the novice teachers move from teacher training institution to the school classroom to teach for the first time.

Novice Language Teachers: Insights and Perspectives for the First Year is a collection of first-year teaching studies and accounts from eleven different settings. The studies are intended primarily for pre-service language teachers and teacher educators to reflect on, so that they will have a better idea of the reality of classroom. Nevertheless, I believe that experienced teachers, especially those involved in mentoring new teachers, would also find the book useful in understanding the needs and challenges of their new colleagues.

The edited book is clearly structured. Chapter 1 is an introductory chapter by the editor, explaining the significance of the first year of teaching and the purposes of the book, as well as presenting a brief summary of each chapter. Chapters 2 to 9 are studies. They are all presented in the format of Introduction – Literature review – Research methodology – Findings – Discussion – Conclusion for cohesive purposes, which is a thoughtful and helpful arrangement. Chapters 10 to 12 are accounts in which three teachers narrate their own first-year experiences in a reflective manner.

In Chapter 2, *Teachers' use of metaphor in making sense of the first year of teaching*, Steve Mann analyses how five first-year teachers

who had recently completed an MA Education TEFL programme in England and had returned to their home countries to teach negotiated the first year of language teaching. This is done by looking at the metaphors they used in their reflective journals and correspondences with the researcher. It was found that the teachers did not hold on to the 'root' metaphors they had developed early in the MA programme, and metaphors of 'maintaining balance' were foregrounded.

Chapter 3 by Stephen Moore, *Trained for teaching high school, poached for teacher training: a case study of a Cambodian English teacher's first year of teaching in Cambodia*, describes the first-year experience of a Cambodian teacher who was trained to teach English in local secondary schools but ended up teaching on the BEd (TEFL) programme she had just graduated from. Working within this specific context, she identified six significant issues, which she grouped into two sets: institutional and personal. The institutional challenges include (1) the programme's transition from being taught by native English speakers to being taught by Cambodians; and (2) the introduction of a student's contribution fee which created unrest among the students. The four personal issues are (1) the pride and responsibility associated with being a university lecturer; (2) teaching classes in class in which many students had not done their homework; (3) dealing with trouble-makers; and (4) the resistance of some students to the communicative teaching methodology. The chapter describes how the novice teacher overcame the challenges and helped her students learn in spite of them.

Chapter 4, *Learning to teach language in the first year: a Singapore case study*, by Thomas Farrell, outlines the socialisation and development of a new Singaporean teacher during his first year, especially on how he balanced a delicate and sometimes conflicting role between learning to teach and learning to become a teacher within a local school with an established culture. The key issues include teaching approach, course content and collegial relationships. The study also proposes that a 'story framework' (orientation – complication – result) can be used by language teacher educators to impose some order on the array of different

experiences novice teachers may encounter in their first year when preparing the teachers-to-be.

Chapter 5 by David Hayes, *Occupational socialisation in the first year of teaching: perspectives from Thailand*, documents how four Thai teachers navigated their first year of teaching using a life history research method. Unfortunately, none of these teachers experienced any formal induction in their first year. It is thus argued that preparing new teachers for the reality of the classroom during teacher training programmes and on-the-job guidance in dealing with school structures and collegial relationships would have alleviated some of the burdens these teachers faced.

Chapter 6, *The transition from teacher education to ESL/EFL teaching in the first year for non-native English speaking teachers in Canada*, by Clea Schmidt outlines how the non-native speaker language teacher participants in Canada transitioned into their first year. Issues concerning self-confidence, perceived competence and discrimination in hiring practices are particularly prominent, and these in turn relate to the notions of language proficiency and language ownership. The author suggests that on top of supporting these non-native speaker new teachers, language teacher educators should explicitly challenge systemic barriers to the successful integration of non-native speaker teachers in an ESL context.

Chapter 7 by Alan Urmston and Martha Pennington, *The beliefs and practices of novice teachers in Hong Kong: change and resistance to change in an Asian teaching context*, is a study about the experiences of Hong Kong new teachers in the two-year period following their graduation from a BA in Teaching English course. The novices reported that it was difficult to adopt interactive and innovative approaches that they had been exposed to in their initial training into their classrooms due to constraints such as public examinations. The researchers have also found inconsistency between the new teachers' stated beliefs and their actual classroom practices.

In Chapter 8, *Teaching Post-CELTA: the interplay of novice teacher, course and context*, Michaela Borg outlines how native English speaker teachers finishing CELTA, a four-week pre-service teacher training course in the UK, went on to teach in different

settings in Europe. Apart from finding a lot of parallels among the teachers, the researcher also concludes that the CELTA cannot prepare teachers for all eventualities and the programme particularly lacks elements of cultural awareness.

Chapter 9, *Ghosts on the cupboard: discursive hauntings during the first year of French Immersion teaching in Canada*, by Lace Brogden and Becky Page, is the only chapter in this collection about a language environment other than an English teaching and learning context, specifically French immersion in Canada. The study has discovered an overarching theme of isolation among the novices. The researchers believe that reciprocal, collegial support, and professional and linguistic mentorship can contribute to successful induction experiences, which would in turn hold promises for the pupils and the teaching profession.

Chapter 10, *From rats to language learners: the transition from the biochemistry laboratory to the language classroom in the first year of teaching*, is an account by Teresa Ting, a new teacher who was an ex-biochemist. In the absence of collegial support, she engaged herself with a community of practice through reading journal articles. Also, the research attitude instilled upon her during her biochemist-training, together with the narrative inquiry she was exposed to through journal reading, supported her reflective and reflexive practice. It is concluded that professional development can be enhanced by participation in the global EFL community, regardless of the local professional landscapes.

Chapter 11 by Alix Furness, *Formation of ESL teacher identity during the first year: an introspective study*, is the author's analysis of her own teaching journals written during her first year as a foreign teacher in Japan. She underwent different stages of development as well as negative feelings, and eventually gained confidence and knowledge. She also discovers that the themes and categories of her journals are centered around culture (such as her foreign status). That said, she concludes that the issues behind identity formation during the first year appear to be the same regardless of where and when the novice teacher starts practicing.

Chapter 12 by Yukie Iwamura, *My first year of language teaching in Japan*, is a personal

recount of how an English teacher in Japan made sense of teaching each time she moved from one teaching context to another. She describes her first two transitions, from being trained in a local university to teaching in a public junior high school, and then to working in a private English conversation school in relation to the teacher education she received (and the lack thereof), the teaching contexts and the problems she was faced with. She then describes how her then graduate studies were preparing her for her third transition into teaching in a university. She believes it is most important for teacher education programmes to equip future teachers with the techniques to analyse their problems and to find solutions themselves.

In conclusion, the cases in this collection are carefully selected, reflecting variety in various ways. Firstly, the studies cover a number of important issues in the first year of teaching such as teacher socialisation (e.g. Chapter 5), reflective practice (e.g. Chapter 10) and professional identity (e.g. Chapter 11). Secondly, they outline different methods of data collection, ranging from metaphor analysis (Chapter 2) to interviews (e.g. Chapter 7) to introspective study using the self as subject (Chapter 11). Thirdly, the collection encompasses studies from different parts of the world – Cambodia (Chapter 3), Singapore (Chapter 4), Hong Kong (Chapter 7) and Canada (Chapter 9), to name but a few. This international perspective is particularly valuable as it represents how contexts, such as those of language, politics, education, affect the development of new teachers, although the extent varies from area to area. The uniqueness of each context and the shared themes among all cases present an interesting and thought-provoking picture of the first year of teaching. That said, I feel that a concluding chapter could have been added to discuss what the findings suggest, and where pre-service teacher training programmes, especially those preparing second language teachers, should go from there.

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