

## **Book Review**

### **New Approaches to English Language and Education in Taiwan: Cultural and intercultural perspectives**

Wen-Chuan Lin and Michael Byram, (Eds.). Tung Hua Book Co., 2016. 412 pp.  
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*New Approaches to English Language and Education in Taiwan* is a collection of “stories” told by 12 Taiwanese researchers about the contemporary development of English language education in Taiwan. The book starts with an excellent introduction (by the editors) to innovative attempts at enhancing English language and education in Taiwan. Thereafter, the 12 chapters are grouped thematically. The first two review the development of language education and monoculturalism in Taiwan before 1945. They also discuss the trend of multiculturalism and the need for intercultural citizenship in Taiwan to meet the needs of the globalized society (Chapter 1); and the language attitude, education, and identity of a Taiwanese woman who went through three educational systems in Taiwan (Chapter 2). These chapters set the scene by filling readers in on the linguistic landscape and complexities in a seemingly monolingual environment. This is particularly interesting and timely as Taiwan enters a new era with President Tsai-Ing-Wen announcing in her inaugural address plans to revive and restore indigenous cultures and languages.

The next two chapters focus on the completely different English learning cultures in elementary and junior high schooling, and the negative impact on student learning of that difference. They include a critical evaluation of the abrupt change from a communication-focused approach in elementary schools to a conventional grammar-based classroom in secondary schools (Chapter 3), and a discussion of the reasons for the discontinuity between the two educational phases (Chapter 4).

The following four chapters are mainly based on action research experimentation with new pedagogical ideas in secondary and university language classrooms. Chapter 6 targets ways to increase the learning motivation of low-achievers in English in university and Chapter 7 introduces a framework for a translation curriculum based on learners’ needs. Chapters 5 and 8, though adopting different perspectives, both emphasize the importance of developing cultural awareness in EFL teaching. The final section of the book shifts the focus to teachers, covering aspects such as the quality of training for EFL teachers in Taiwan (Chapter 10), and the ineffectiveness of team-teaching involving local and native-English speaking teachers due to different conceptualisations of EFL practices (Chapter 9). The last chapter of the book highlights a teacher summer study programme which echoes the cultural awareness theme of Chapters 5 and 8.

This book has practical value for those interested in ESL/EFL teaching and not only in Taiwan. Most of the contributors are, or once were, English teachers themselves; thus the experiences shared in the stories are fresh and alive, and carry the voice of an insider which connects the authors and the readers. In addition to reporting major findings, each chapter ends with a detailed description of the methodological approach, the research implications and practical suggestions. Although all the chapters are research-based, the supplementary suggestions fill any vacuum that might have resulted from the divorce of theory and practice.

Another merit of the book is its cross-regional applicability. The issues discussed are not uncommon in other parts of Asia. Examples include the dilemma of developing a dual focus on culture and linguistic components of English among EFL learners (as discussed in Chapter 5), or the compromises needed for local EFL and foreign teachers to achieve effective teaching (in chapter 9).

The editors have tried hard to arrange the book thematically but its explicit structure is unfortunately a little unpolished, making this meticulous arrangement almost hidden. For instance, signposts that indicate thematic groupings and chapter cross-referencing are absent. Those who miss the introductory chapter may struggle to see the interconnectedness of the chapters.

This book offers readers a valuable window to almost all the key issues about English language education in Taiwan, including language attitudes, identity, learning process, motivation and training for English teachers, to name just a few. It identifies gaps in existing practices and most importantly, provides readers with ingenious models and useful tips to solve the issues identified. The orientation towards qualitative research (eight of the studies adopt a mix of qualitative methods while only four have a quantitative element) may undermine the generalisability of the findings of some of the studies, the qualitative nature of the collection nevertheless allows an in-depth examination of authentic learning and teaching experiences. This feature of the book also ties in perfectly with its story-sharing format.

The use of mainly classroom-based research studies in the book acknowledges the importance of research-informed classroom practices, and also encourages teachers to take on a proactive role of researching and becoming the troubleshooters in their daily teaching practices. It is certainly an enticing read for teachers who intend to keep themselves abreast of the latest pedagogical practices in EFL teaching.

### **About the reviewer**

Joanna Lee is a senior lecturer in the Centre for Applied English Studies at the University of Hong Kong. She is the programme coordinator of English enhancement courses for Social Sciences. Her research interests include EAP/ESP, language and gender, and language policy and planning.