

**Amanda Howard and Helen Donaghue (eds.) (2015) *Teacher Evaluation in Second Language Education*. London, New York: Bloomsbury. xii + 220 pages. Hbk ISBN: 9781-4725-0994-9, Pbk 9781-4725-1182-9, e-PDF 978-1-4725-1161-4, e-Pub: 978-1-4725-0690-0.**

A secondary school colleague of mine once reported that an inspector from Ofsted (the government organization which inspects schools in England) had fallen asleep during one of his lessons. I am not sure what grade the lesson was subsequently given, but ever since this incident I have been interested in the quality of teacher evaluation practices and teachers' experiences of them. More recently, I have been involved in evaluating classroom practice in the context of an Initial Teacher Education programme in Modern Languages, where the main emphasis is on providing formative feedback as a tool to promote teachers' learning. Amanda Howard and Helen Donaghue's book *Teacher Evaluation in Second Language Education* sheds light on the evaluation of teachers' practice for both these purposes (appraisal and professional development), though with an emphasis on the latter.

The book comprises an introduction by the editors and twelve chapters. Some chapters report on empirical studies (usually subsets of larger research projects); most include at least some empirical data. There is also one chapter of a more 'conceptual' nature and another which presents an overview of a particular teacher appraisal model. Where the chapter states a specific educational context, it is almost always in the Middle East (eight chapters), with one exception based in Peru. However, this geographical bias did not feel limiting: for example, I found plenty of relevance to my own UK context.

Despite expectations raised for me by the book's title, only a few chapters focus on evaluation in the sense of 'appraisal' of established teachers. More often, the focus is on teachers' professional learning in either a pre- or in-service context (nine chapters); specifically, most chapters are concerned with lesson observation and feedback as tools for teacher development. I also felt that the arrangement of the chapters into the four parts of the book, each with a different theme – 'Key approaches'; 'Tools for Investigation and Collaboration'; 'Focus on Discourse'; 'Participant responses' – was less clear and coherent than it could have been at times.

Notwithstanding these issues, many individual chapters contain plenty of interest and stimulus for reflection. Chapter 1, by Steve Mann and Steve Walsh ('Reflective dimensions of CPD: supporting self-evaluation and peer evaluation'), argues convincingly for the value of reflective practice as part of teachers' self- and peer-evaluation. One additional question which the authors might have addressed, however, concerns the ways in which reflective practice might interface with external sources of evidence, such as research findings. The second part of the chapter outlines a range of tools for promoting teacher reflection, such as team teaching and peer observation. However, this is done very briefly, serving mainly to signpost the way for further reading and exploration. Finally, the author presents two examples of reflective tools in action; I found the first to be more illuminating than the second, which seems to suffer from its brevity.

Chapter 2 (Leonardo Mercado and Steve Mann: 'Mentoring for Teacher Evaluation and Development') describes a programme of teacher development and evaluation (both pre- and in-service) in a large EFL teaching centre. The chapter focusses particularly on the role of mentoring in promoting reflection and self-evaluation. Evaluative data are also offered in the form of novice teachers' comments and questionnaire responses. The picture is very positive, but from these brief and selective snippets of data, it is difficult to gain any real insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the mentoring. A prominent theme is the tension inherent in the mentor's dual role: supporting teachers' development on the one hand; appraising them on the other. The authors note simply

that mentors “need to negotiate this difficult balance”, but I would have welcomed further discussion of this interesting and thorny issue.

The third chapter (Mick Randall: ‘Observing for feedback: A counselling perspective’), begins by examining the legacy of research-based and managerial approaches to lesson observation, particularly the importance attached to ‘objective’ records of classroom events. This sets the scene for introducing an alternative perspective, based on principles of humanistic counselling. This emphasizes the need for observers to develop an empathetic understanding of the teacher’s own perspective. Memorably, the author argues that ‘objective’ records (such as lesson observation notes) may actually “erect barriers between the observer and the observed which are dysfunctional for effectively providing feedback from a humanistic perspective”. However, the author does seem to acknowledge the value of such records; I was therefore left wondering how the two approaches might be integrated within an overall programme of teacher learning. Nonetheless, I found this to be a thought-provoking chapter which lived up to the author’s claim of providing “a new perspective on lesson observation”.

In another very interesting chapter (4: ‘From Bit to Whole: Reframing feedback dialogue through critical incidents’), Radhika Iyer-O’Sullivan also focusses on post-observation feedback. Particularly striking for me was the emphasis on the unequal power relations often inherent in feedback situations, which can lead to the observer’s questions being interpreted in unintended ways. Further, the author argues that conventional feedback approaches (e.g. “So – how do you think it went?”) may result in teachers commenting on all aspects of their lesson chronologically; this can cause stress, especially as the teacher is unaware of what the observer thinks. The author therefore advocates a different approach, where teachers identify and analyse a ‘critical incident’ in the observed lesson. Because the discussion is driven by the teacher her/himself, rather than by the observer’s own agenda, the author argues that it is likely to result in deeper and more productive reflection.

In chapter 5 (‘Artefacts in scaffolding the construction of teaching knowledge’), Marion Engin uses a sociocultural perspective to explore the role of artefacts – in this case, written documents such as lesson plans, observation notes and transcripts of feedback sessions – in pre-service language teachers’ learning. A series of short data extracts convincingly illustrate some of the ways in which artefacts “can be powerful scaffolding tools in the interaction between trainer and trainee” – albeit not always in the way the trainer might have intended. For example, one beginning teacher used a feedback session transcript to analyse the accuracy of her spoken English. This chapter is useful in encouraging readers to consider existing practices through a novel lens.

Chapter 6 (Phil Quirke: ‘A system for teacher evaluation’) has a more ‘practical’ feel. It describes a framework for the annual appraisal of languages teachers, as used within the author’s own tertiary education institution. The chapter first summarizes a series of research-informed principles for effective appraisal, going on to show how the approach in question is consistent with these. Key aspects of the framework are its transparency and the central role played by teachers themselves in gathering evaluative evidence from a range of sources. It is argued that, whilst lesson observation and feedback can make important contributions to teacher development, these should not form the “lynchpin” of appraisal procedures (as occurs in many systems), due to serious concerns over validity.

Chapter 7 (Helen Donaghue: ‘Differences between supervisors’ espoused feedback styles and their discourse in post-observation meetings’) analyses the discourse in feedback sessions conducted by two observers. Additionally, interview data allow an exploration of the extent to which these observers actually embody, in practice, the styles of feedback they claim to espouse. There is a clear

mismatch between the 'collaborative' approach which one observer says he uses and the more 'prescriptive' approach revealed by his transcripts. This eye-opening example suggests that it might be valuable for all those involved in teacher observation to conduct similar analyses of their own feedback discourse.

Fiona Copland's chapter (8: 'Evaluative talk in feedback conferences') complements the previous one by offering a detailed discourse analysis of one post-observation feedback session, this time conducted with a group of CELTA trainees. Although some of the conclusions perhaps seem rather self-evident (for example, the analysis "suggests that [trainers'] questions are a particularly valuable resource for identifying trainees' understandings of weaknesses in their lessons"), the extracts successfully bring the interaction to life for the reader. In particular, the author helpfully highlights the difficulty that trainee teachers may experience in navigating the rather unusual social situation represented by this kind of group feedback session.

In chapter 9 ('Student Teacher Placements: a critical commentary'), Neil Hunt uses data from lesson observations and feedback discussions to investigate the learning of one of his own trainee teachers during a school placement. The discussion centres largely on the very interesting tension which emerges between the trainee's attempts to pursue a 'progressive', student-centred pedagogy (via her work for an assignment) and the more traditional, 'disciplinary' approach to which staff and students in the school are accustomed. This, the author claims, is an example of "how [school] placements may contribute to limiting student teachers' pedagogical actions and reflections, thus constructing a minimized, normative performance of a teacher's role". This raises some fascinating questions for teacher education models based on school-university partnerships.

In contrast to most of the preceding contributors, Mick King (10: 'Evaluating experienced teachers') focuses on evaluation in the sense of appraisal. His data illuminate the ways in which appraisal procedures are viewed by experienced TESOL teachers and their appraisers. Whilst most teachers found the process valuable overall, many expressed some degree of dissatisfaction, highlighting in particular the problems of basing teacher appraisal on a single lesson observation. The author offers various useful suggestions for alternative approaches. It should be noted, however, that the views of the teachers and appraisers are very unevenly represented in this chapter, with fifty respondents in the former category versus only two in the latter. This limitation could, I felt, have been acknowledged more strongly.

Chapter 11 (Wayne Trotman: 'Reflective peer observation accounts: what do they reveal?') focusses on a programme of peer observation instigated by the author for university-level EFL teachers. The chapter analyses teachers' accounts of observations they have carried, together with their responses to a follow-up questionnaire. Potentially, this would make for some interesting analysis; however, the chapter is rather brief and the presentation of the data seemed to me to lack the 'breathing space' that it deserved. Nonetheless, some interesting findings emerge with potential implications for those coordinating peer observation programmes. For example, teachers' generally chose to observe more experienced peers and tended to focus on what the teacher was doing, rather than on the students' perspective.

Finally, chapter 12 (Amanda Howard: 'Giving voice to participants in second language education evaluation') again focuses on teacher evaluation in the sense of appraisal. The chapter begins with an excellent overview of key issues involved in teacher appraisal and lesson observation. There does seem to be some repetition here of material covered elsewhere in the book, including the introduction; however, very usefully (and not before time!), a case is made as to why Second Language Education is distinctive from other areas of education – and why, therefore, teacher evaluation procedures might also need to be different. The main body of the chapter explores

participants' views of appraisal procedures in a tertiary education institution, drawing on interviews with supervisors, teachers and ex-students (current teachers who had previously been present as students in observed lessons). The extracts from the observer and teacher interviews in particular are illuminating; the brief section exploring ex-students' views feels rather more limited and highlights the need for more systematic study in this area.

In sum, despite some variation between individual chapters in terms of the issues they address, the approach taken and the depth with which empirical data are analysed, this volume will be valuable for many readers involved in teacher evaluation and development, particularly via lesson observation and feedback. Various contributors offer fresh and thought-provoking perspectives on familiar issues; I was certainly prompted to think critically about some of the established practices in my own Initial Teacher Education context. Taken as a whole, the book provides a strong argument for developing processes which empower teachers as active, reflective agents in their own professional learning – in contrast to the top-down, managerial approaches which often predominate.