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Book Review

Reflexivity in Language and Intercultural Education: Rethinking Multilingualism and Interculturality, Julie S. Byrd Clark & Fred Dervin (Eds.), Routledge, (2014), New York /Abingdon, 254 pp., ISBN 978-0-415-71659-8, GBP 90.00 (hardback)

This collection of chapters represents a valuable and timely attempt to broaden debate on *reflexivity* in the context of research and practice in language and intercultural education.

Julie Byrd Clark and **Fred Dervin** provide a useful introduction to what is meant by *reflexivity* in different areas of applied linguistics and language and intercultural education, as well as in the social sciences. The authors emphasise how *reflexivity* is a significant concept for all those involved in language and intercultural education and research, whether as learners, educators, researchers or research participants, stressing too that greater cognisance needs to be taken of the intersections between different actors. They identify three overlapping representations of *reflexivity*: *critical reflection*, *awareness* and *hyper-reflexivity* (Spivak 1988).

The main body of the book is divided into three sections: ‘Reflexivity of the Other’, ‘Reflexivity of the Self’ and ‘Complex Junctions Between Self and Other’. The first starts with a case study by **Jane Jackson** of a female student at a Hong Kong university, majoring in English, reflecting on periods of study abroad. Jackson analyses the student’s guided oral and written narratives following these sojourns and highlights how she moved away from stereotypical judgements about places and people towards a more nuanced understanding of cultural diversity and a recognition of a need to be more *self-reflexive*. Jackson’s study shares similarities with other studies of experiences of students on international exchange and sojourns (e.g. Benson et. al 2013), but adds to these studies by raising important questions about how best to encourage critical reflection and *self-reflexivity* in a structured manner following return home. **Jérémie Séror** focuses on lecturer feedback on the written work in English of a Japanese exchange student at a Canadian university and its effect on the student’s motivation, sense of progress, legitimacy as a writer of English and relationships with academic staff. Interview data and written lecturer feedback are analysed and Séror emphasises the importance of *reflexivity* on the part of feedback –givers in terms of understanding how powerful discourses position themselves and students. **Alex Frame** uses his experience on an editorial team producing a newsletter during a congress of a pan-European student association as a springboard to a wide-ranging discussion on how in communicative interaction individuals draw on different identities and representations of themselves and others, play different roles, and adjust their communicative behaviour to consciously repair breakdowns in communication and to influence the outcome of interactions to their own purposes. In doing so, he argues that students on language and/or intercultural education programmes can be helped to develop such *reflexivity*.

The second section starts with a very interesting account by **Prue Holmes** of revisiting her Ph.D. thesis on the intercultural communication experiences of ‘ethnic’ Chinese students in a New Zealand university which she acknowledges failed to adequately explore both her own and the students’ ‘relationality’ and ‘positionality’ and ‘the multilingual /intercultural spaces that the research occupies’ (p. 101). Holmes highlights the changing relationships between researcher and research subjects, how meaning was constructed and negotiated, and the students’ emerging *reflexivity* concerning their changing identities and emerging understandings of culture and communication. Power is a key notion in the chapter by **Sylvie Lamoureux** who discusses her critical ethnographic research project at the bilingual (French-English) University of Ottawa, Canada, into the early university experiences of Francophone Canadian young people

from regions where French speakers are in the extreme minority. Second year Francophone university students were recruited as mentors, informants and co-researchers, and university registry and student support staff unit also involved. Lamoureux provides striking evidence of how the first year Francophone students were viewed by some staff as lacking the type of ‘academic’ French necessary for university study and were subject to marginalising ideological discourses. She concludes by emphasising how the project helped the mentors involved in the project develop greater *self-reflexivity*, engendered greater *reflexivity* among staff and led to initial steps being taken to better support Francophone students. The chapter by **David Malinowski** and **Mark Evan Nelson** represents an original approach to exploring in depth questions of how far different dimensions of *reflexivity* are adequately addressed in published research. Each reads, reflects on and writes a commentary on the degree and nature of *reflexivity* in two of the other researcher’s published articles or chapters on the creation of multimodal texts; each commentary is then considered by the original writer and a response written. The chapter is best read if the reader has access to the original publications.

In the third section **Eric Chauvier** discusses his funded research project involving teenagers from estates in the Parisian suburbs that have (often wrongly attributed) reputations for being urban ghettos. In the project the teenagers were encouraged to co-construct digital anthropological texts about their lives and environments to counter common representations and to develop *self-reflexivity*. The value of Chauvier’s research is that it suggests that co-construction of narratives offers a way for educators to provide a voice to those often ignored in educational systems. **Christian Chun** also focuses on the creation of counter-discourses in a workshop he led in a public space as part of a demonstration against increasing economic inequality in Los Angeles in 2011, focusing too on the ‘linguistic landscape’ of the public space and the protestors’ attempts to recontextualise this space. **Ulrike Najjar** is interested, too, in how public spaces can be used both for pedagogic and research purposes in the field of language and intercultural education. She provides a fascinating account of how she accompanies language learners she teaches in Melbourne, Australia, on walks guided by the learners who narrate the significance of places for their intercultural learning. Learners studying at a distance are also encouraged to guide her on ‘virtual’ walks. **Miguel Pérez-Milans** and **Carlos Soto** describe a teacher’s attempt to tap into and build on the lived experiences of language Nepali learners of English at a Hong Kong high school. They proceed to describe how the teacher began a series of posts to the class Facebook page which stimulated deeper dialogue between learners and teachers. In follow-up Facebook interaction learners constructed their own narratives built on their lived experiences and the teacher developed a deeper understanding of what it means to be *critically reflexive*.

In concluding **Fred Dervin** and **Julie Byrd-Clark** emphasise that *reflexivity* should lead to changing social and pedagogic practice which in turn can lead to greater *reflexivity*. This is no easy task and one which requires much greater consideration of what *reflexivity* might mean for research and pedagogy. **Claire Kramsch**, in a short final commentary, stresses the importance of helping learners to adapt their evolving competence to different multilingual contexts, reflect on issues of power that underlie intercultural relationships and communication, and understand and counter media and popular representations of the world. She warns against *reflexivity* becoming ‘self-indulgent narcissism or dialogue with the self’ (p. 242) and highlights the need for training of teachers and teacher educators to ensure that *reflexivity* instead leads to individual transformation and intercultural understanding

The collection of chapters is valuable particularly because it emphasises that *reflexivity* should be seen as a dynamic and evolving notion that is applicable to all those involved in research and pedagogy and

that can be applied positively to equalise power relationships and lead to greater centrality and legitimacy of the research participant or learner. This inevitably raises further questions of what place *reflexivity* has in discussions and models of intercultural competence (e.g. Deardorff 2006), the relationship between *self-reflexivity* and such concepts as ‘reflective practice’ and ‘critical literacy’, in what ways *reflexivity* can gradually be developed in language and intercultural education, whether *reflexivity* needs to be interpreted differently depending on cultural context, and how *reflexivity* can be made more central to research in the field of intercultural communication and in multilingual contexts.

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