

Review

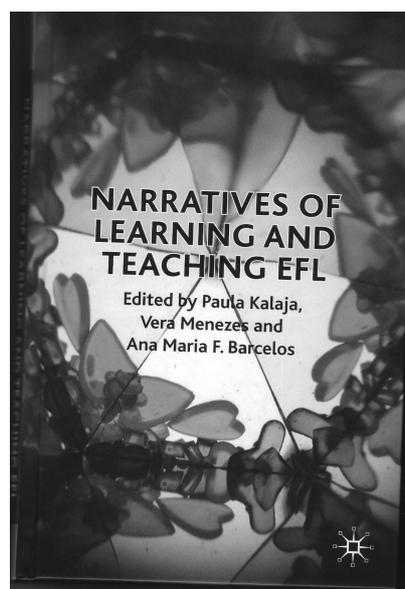
KALAJA, P.; MENEZES, V.; BARCELOS, A. M. (Ed.) *Narratives of learning and teaching EFL*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. 256 p.

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The editors of *Narratives of learning and teaching EFL* have assembled a collection of interesting research reports on lived experiences written by well-known researchers in Brazil (Paiva, Barcelos, Miccoli, Dutra and Mello), Finland (Kalaja, Karlsson, Nikula, Pitkänen-Huhta, Alanen and Dufva), Japan (Coterall, Murray, Murphey and Carpenter, Keiko and Sakui), China (Benson and Chick) and England (Block). Each chapter presents a piece of a kaleidoscopic image consisting of teachers' and learners' lived experiences in the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

The kaleidoscope, visually displayed on the front cover, is the metaphor used by the editors to describe the book. They claim that it “works as a tube of mirrors and each chapter as coloured beads put into movement by each one's reading, projecting different images of the complexity of learning and teaching EFL” (p. 217).

As the editors explain in the introduction, the book presents unity, in the research context within EFL, and, at the same time, diversity, mainly due to the articles which approach a wide range of EFL contexts in Brazil, Finland, Japan, Hong Kong and Spain. Likewise, one can find unity in the data (lived



experiences), whereas diversity can be found in form and content of narratives - some are written, others are visual, and still others are multimedia.

As regards the content, one can find learners talking about their learning processes as well as teachers talking about and reflecting upon EFL teaching experiences. Diversity and unity are both found in the theoretical support. The sociocultural theory permeates several works, but it should be noted that other frameworks, such as the discursive approach and chaos/complexity theory, are also discussed. There is also unity and diversity in methodology. Although all the chapters deal with narratives, some may be characterized as analysis of narratives (narratives are the data) and others as narrative analysis (research is reported in the form of an explanatory narrative).

The volume is organized in six parts: introduction, written narratives, self-narratives, oral narratives, multimodal narratives, and conclusion.

One key aspect which calls the reader's attention is the manner in which the introduction and the conclusion are presented. The table shown on pages 6, 7 and 8, for instance, offers the reader a helpful summary of the chapters. In this chart, one can find the EFL context for each chapter and also identify if it is formal or informal. This chart also informs the reader as to the type of analysis (analysis of narratives or narrative analysis), and the kind of data used (written narratives, journals, email, interviews, counseling sessions, notes, reflections, student evaluations, visual narratives, photographs, visual narratives, and multimodal narratives). The final column of the chart brings the framework, or the focus, of the research report. Some include attribution theory, content analysis, sociocultural theory, as well as chaos/complexity.

In the conclusion, Menezes, Barcelos and Kalaja present the connections among the chapters, the lessons learned from the narratives and the power of the narrative. The authors call the readers' attention to the main themes which emerged from the chapters, such as identity, communities of practice and agency. In addition, they refer to methodological issues and discuss the role of the researcher as a narrator as well as the role of the participants in the analysis of their own narratives. The conclusion invites the reader to contemplate the implications of the results on the classroom and on future research.

Part II joins Murphey and Carpenter (in Japan) to the majority of the Brazilian researchers, all of whom have been working with written narratives. Murphey and Carpenter's main concerns include agency, hope and the need to empower students and to stimulate students to invest in communities of practice. Barcelos answers three key questions related to Brazilian learners' beliefs: "Which beliefs about the place to study English in Brazil underlie students'

experiences? How do these experiences shape their beliefs? How do they characterize their language learning experiences in their narratives?” Dutra and Mello show how two in-service teachers and two pre-service teachers envision their professional lives through self-observation registered in narratives and journals, among other research tools. Miccoli, in turn, works with teachers and compares experiences of Brazilian teachers in two different contexts: the public and the private.

Part III presents two chapters working with self-narratives. Karlsson, in chapter 6, and Sakui and Cowie, in chapter 7, discuss different teaching experiences through the lens of autobiographical experiences. Karlsson refers to the interaction between learners and counselors, while Sakui and Cowie share with the readers their experiences with students’ resistance and reveal how they made sense of what they experienced.

Part IV consists of four chapters, all of which deal with oral narratives. Cotterall delves into the passion and persistence found in the story of an English student from Japan; Murray defends the importance of communities of practices in 3 stories of Japanese EFL learners; Block shows how a Spanish EFL student developed her “English textual identity via her writing activities” (p.152); and Chick and Benson, using data from interviews, deal with the notion of identity through the description of one student’s experiences in Hong Kong and overseas as representative of what they call “frequent flyers”, students who study overseas, but constantly fly home during their time abroad.

Some of the most innovative work found in this book is that from part V, which focuses on visual and multimedia narratives. Nikula and Pitkänen-Huhta analyze some photographs taken by teenagers to “represent the role of English in their out-of-schools lives” (p. 171); Kalaja, Alanen and Dufva make use of drawings to “investigate the second language learning process and to identify the mediational means that students consider important in relation to themselves as language learners” (p.189); and Menezes works with a corpus of multimedia language learning histories which includes text, hyperlinks, image and sounds to defend that second language acquisition is a complex system.

This book is a valuable addition to the library of any ELT professional, not only because of the insights into language acquisition, identity, teacher education, among so many other valuable themes, but also because of the different ways researchers approach narratives of EFL learning and teaching.

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