

**Tony Wright**

*Roles of teachers and learners.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987. (164 pp.)

**Martin Bygate**

*Speaking.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987. (121 pp.)

A new series of publications on language teaching entitled A Scheme for Teacher Education has been launched by Oxford University Press. The two titles above form part of this scheme and for this reason are here reviewed together. The series is edited by two men whose names are well known in the field of applied linguistics: H.G. Widdowson and C.N. Candlin. This scheme includes three sub-series:

- (1) Language Knowledge which comprises four books: Pronunciation, Vocabulary, Grammar and Discourse
- (2) Modes of Behaviour which focuses on the four skills: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening
- (3) Modes of Action with six titles: Syllabus Planning, Task Design, Classroom Interaction, Roles of Teachers and Learners, The Content of Classroom Teaching and Evaluating Curricula and Assessing Learners.

The aim of this series is to promote the professional development of language teachers. It looks critically at various ideas and methods and suggests ways of implementing them in the classroom. Each book combines text and task: the text explains the theory and provides guidance in materials design; the tasks demonstrate how to apply the theory to practice in the form of teaching activities.

Wright's book, *Roles of Teachers and Learners*, explores the ways in which roles influence the teaching/learning process. Teaching and learning are seen as social activities, implying role relationships between teacher and learner, as well as between learner and learner. The factors which influence role relations (and indirectly the effectiveness of classroom activities) are discussed individually. These include the status, attitudes, personality and motivation of both teachers and learners, as well as the goals and nature of classroom tasks. Twenty-six tasks are set to guide the reader to assess his own role and how it influences others involved in the teaching/learning process.

Our concept of what teacher and learner roles in a classroom should be has been shaped by many factors. By describing a wide variety of teacher roles, Wright invites the reader to ask: "Is this true of me?" and to re-assess his role in terms of teaching tasks such as imparting knowledge, listening, evaluating, facilitating and motivating. In this way the teacher arrives at a teaching style which "lies at the heart of the interpersonal relationship between teacher and learner".

General beliefs and attitudes about education and the role of knowledge influence our choice and design of teaching materials. Wright demonstrates this by describing various types of material used to achieve specific language aims by means of different teaching strategies.

He then shifts attention to learners and learning tasks, discussing the individual learner's role as well as the interpersonal relationships within a group of learners. The final section of the book is designed to assist both teachers and learners to develop and enhance the effectiveness of their roles. In order to become better teachers and adopt more effective teaching strategies, teachers are urged to investigate various aspects of teachers' and learners' role behaviour. To this end a number of tasks are set, to be done in collaboration with one or more colleagues. These include, inter alia, investigations into classroom climate, group working patterns, classroom organisation, learner strategies and instructional style. The book ends with an outline of how teachers can set up their own investigations, collect data and interpret their results.

I found this book both stimulating and thought-provoking. Teachers of all subjects would find it meaningful, but from the point of view of the language teacher it is particularly illuminating and

practical, for it forces him to re-assess his role and task in the classroom. The teacher who works through this book is bound to re-think the strategies he uses to foster co-operative learning in the language classroom.

Martin Bygate contends, in his introduction to *Speaking*, that because we can almost all speak, we tend to take the skill too much for granted. Literary skills appear to be “more prized” than the speaking skill, yet it is the latter by which we are most frequently judged and which we use “to carry out most of our basic transactions”.

Having distinguished between language knowledge (i.e. knowledge of grammar and pronunciation rules and vocabulary) and language skill (the ability to use this knowledge), he makes a further distinction between the ability to manipulate grammar and vocabulary on the one hand, and the skill of resolving specific kinds of communication problems (like negotiating meaning and managing interaction) on the other. Tasks are set to assist the reader in understanding all that is involved in the apparently simple act of speaking to someone.

In the second section of the book, Bygate looks at various methods of teaching speaking and the kinds of activities that promote the development of learners' oral skills. He summarizes the views of Rivers and Temperley, Littlewood, Ur and Harmer and then provides a useful compilation of many of the oral activities they advocate in their numerous publications, as well as some excellent ones of his own. These include information – gap activities, communication games and simulations. The tasks set focus the teacher's attention on exactly what happens when pupils carry out these activities, thus helping him to assess their effectiveness and also select those most likely to suit his pupils' needs. The section ends with a discussion of the place of oral skills in the curriculum.

In the final section of the book, Bygate encourages teachers to look more closely at group work to see what actually happens during “oral interaction”. He suggests ideas for projects which the teacher can carry out, using his own classroom as a data source. In effect, the teacher is shown how to test out the ideas supplied in the previous sections.

What strikes one about both these publications is that they actively involve the reader in the issue discussed. There are 71 tasks in Wright's book and no fewer than 114 in Bygate's – tasks which invite the reader not merely to take note of, but rather to explore and critically assess the theory or activity described. In this way the chief aim of the series is realised: to assist teachers to improve their language teaching through independent experimentation in their own classrooms.

I have no doubt that there is a very real need for a scheme of this nature and this series is an extremely comprehensive one, as indicated in the opening paragraph of this review. Any serious teacher of language who works through this series would reap considerable benefits, especially as there are coherent links between all the areas of enquiry and activity covered. The books thus cross refer within and across the different sub-series.

“If language teaching is to be a genuinely professional enterprise, it requires continual experimentation and evaluation on the part of practitioners”, write the series editors. I believe that this series will go a long way towards promoting this aim.

J.J. Swartz