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Macmillan Books for Teachers (Series Editor: Adrian Underhill)

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**Review: *Macmillan Books for Teachers*
(Series Editor: Adrian Underhill)**

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Perhaps like me, you occasionally have the chance to browse some of the numerous academic journals devoted to EFL, ESL and CALL. Normally, your time will have been devoured by competing demands of preparation, teaching, correction, consultation and collaboration. But sometimes, between semesters or after exams you are troubled by the realization that your teaching methods have been running on automatic for quite some time and you feel you ought to be refueling from that growing body of academic research you believe is constantly generating new insights into how to teach English. And for your own sake, and that of your students', you know you should be doing more than the occasional workshop on the uses of corpora. You should be keeping up to date with the literature.

So, heading to the library which you find eerily empty at this time of the year, you flick through some recent issues of *Foreign Language Annals* or *English Worldwide*. Maybe you have chanced upon the very journal you are now reading. Or you muse over the *Hong Kong Journal of Applied Linguistics* surprised that such a journal should even exist. You note one of the articles: "Sociolinguistic Competence: An often neglected and de-emphasized aspect of foreign language teaching". And you are forced to admit, upon reflection, that yes, it is neglected in your classroom also. Turning to the *IRAL (International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching)* you see an article, "What do learners make of teachers' gestures in the language classroom" and wonder if you even use gesture – you suppose you must – but cannot be sure of

what you make of it yourself, much less see it from a learner's perspective. You notice that all this issue's articles are about gesture and you realize the issue is not one you have ever given serious consideration to. Perhaps you should.

Having spent the morning reading you may have only deepened your sense of inadequacy. You toy with the idea of taking out a subscription – but which one? You resolve to spend a few hours each week in the library but in your heart of hearts know that once the term or semester kicks in your resolution will be brushed aside by the relentless demands of the tasks at hand. You have learnt a few worthwhile things perhaps. Maybe you had been puzzled by the inclusion of a phonetic chart in *English File* (a common text for intermediate students here). Or perhaps you had wondered about the origin of exercises on “Emphasizing important words” in *English 365*. Having read some of the literature you can see how the research dribbles its way into common textbooks like these.

Nevertheless, the need for a way to access some of the fruit of academic research remains. But I have discovered in the last few months that Macmillan's Books for Teachers series edited by Adrian Underhill has made a real and substantial contribution to solving this problem. Some of the texts in the series have a long history – Christine Nuttall's *Teaching Reading Skills* was first published in 1982. A review of a second edition said the book was ‘not an examination of...the most current theories’ but it did ‘an excellent job’ of providing ‘teachers with the guidance to help their students become proficient readers’ (Graney). A new edition was published as part of the Macmillan series last year. Scott Thronbury's *Uncovering Grammar* and *Beyond the Sentence* are more recent (2001, 2005). Nevertheless, taken as a whole, the series can help bridge the gap between recent research and teacher practice.

Let me be more specific. First, the approach. Most of the books are divided into two sections, the first of which is a mixture of theory, pedagogy and research. The second will generally be photocopiable tasks for classroom use. The latter enable you to use in class the insights gained in the first section. Many of the tasks are very effective in the classroom.

Let us take one example – *Beyond the Sentence* by Scott Thornbury which shows how discourse analysis can deepen students' understanding of notions such as coherence and cohesion. Many teachers who teach students Writing for Academic Purposes by using works such as *Academic Writing* by Oshima and Hogue will find the Thornbury text can provide a more convincing and satisfying understanding of the ways a text is glued together. As one reviewer comments, *Beyond the Sentence* 'is not for the scholar already well-versed in discourse analysis' but for the practising teacher it is a very useful book of methodology (Sharma).

Uncovering Grammar another of Thornbury's works endeavors to get the reader to see grammar as a process that is 'dynamic' and 'self-organizing' and 'emergent' rather than a set of rules to be 'covered' (2005, 48). You may, like reviewer Martin Parrott, disagree with this view, but as even Parrot concedes, it will 'help your own construct of learning and teaching to "emerge"(208)'. And perhaps more importantly for the teacher, the 'grammaring' tasks at the back of the book are salient and interesting. A few of them require careful preparation - being more subtle than they first seem, but they are worth the effort nonetheless. And readers converted to the approach can join a group of like minded teachers in a Yahoo Group named 'Dogme' where they can debate and collaborate and self-criticize with all the relish and angst that ideological groups of the 'liberal left' once used to experience.¹

Other books in the series cover teaching practice, sounds, reading, and an anthology of classroom activities. Even some of the ones I first doubted, such as Adrian Underhill's *Sound Foundations*, I find myself warming to as I become more familiar with them. Most have applications to all levels of learner, some such as *Children Learning English* are more focused.

¹. The Internet address

(<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/dogme/>)

Titles in the series:

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|----------------------------------|---|
| <i>Beyond the Sentence</i> | Scott Thornbury |
| <i>Children Learning English</i> | Jayne Moon |
| <i>Discover English</i> | Rod Bolitho and Brian Tomlinson |
| <i>Learning Teaching</i> | Jim Scrivener |
| <i>Sound Foundations</i> | Adrian Underhill |
| <i>Teaching Practice</i> | Roger Gower, Diane Phillips and Steve Walters |
| <i>Teaching Reading Skills</i> | Christine Nuttall |
| <i>Uncovering Grammar</i> | Scott Thornbury |
| <i>700 Classroom Activities</i> | David Seymour & Maria Popova. |

The Author

Michael Alroe studied English Literature, Economics, and Anthropology in Australia. Before coming to Thailand and joining Chulalongkorn University Language Institute, he taught EFL in Turkey and Hong Kong.

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