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0521559049 - Voices from the Language Classroom: Qualitative Research in Second  
Language Education

Edited by Kathleen M. Bailey and David Nunan

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# Voices From the Language Classroom

Qualitative research in  
second language education

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To Les,  
who softened my voice by listening quietly.  
– Kathi

To my co-editor and pal,  
whose idea it was in the first place.  
– David

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## Preface

This is a collection of international stories that had its beginnings as a volume at a language teacher education conference in Hong Kong in April of 1991. Somewhere in the swirl of presentations and panels, while we are discussing our shared interest in research on teachers' decision making, Kathi says to David, "Hey, I've got this idea for a book." David replies, "Great! Let's talk about it in Singapore."

We next meet at a conference at the Regional Language Centre about classroom research. David says, "So, Bailey, what's this idea about a book?" All Kathi has is a title, a kernel, the inception of an idea – something about "Voices." It will be a book about learning and teaching languages, not as these processes are depicted in methodology texts and position papers, but as they are experienced and understood by language learners and teachers. At this conference Kathi meets Mick Hilleson for the first time, and he tells her about his research with secondary school students in Singapore. A good omen: Through a serendipitous conversation a possible chapter has emerged.

Kathi and David brainstorm about other possible contributors, thematic units, a focus, a timeline. No previously published papers. Multiple data sets to permit triangulation. Papers that provide a platform for teachers' and learners' perceptions. We divide up the work and meet again in three months in Los Angeles. We sketch out our philosophy and contact potential contributors – people whose work we respect and who have had experience working in the tradition of naturalistic inquiry. Some are too busy but suggest colleagues or graduate students whose research would be appropriate. The idea gains momentum. David hacks away furiously at his laptop, churning out letters and abstracts urging our authors to send us descriptions of their papers.

Vancouver, February 1992: The TESOL Convention. We meet again, juggling our calendars to find time to talk and think and court the publishers. (It is a strange idea after all. Will anyone be interested?) We go our separate ways, convinced that this project is worth doing, but wondering how it will get done.

Then the stories begin to emerge. The manuscripts arrive. Some are from colleagues or former students. Others are from distant friends whom we have not yet met. Some are based on the authors' master's theses, doctoral dissertations, or qualifying papers. Some are more pol-

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ished than others, some more compelling, but each is powerful. They provide a forum for voices that have much to say about apparently mundane issues (classroom seating arrangements, registration procedures, lesson plans). But as we read the voices of teachers and students quoted in these chapters, we see that these concerns are not mundane at all when viewed from the participants' perspective. We are enmeshed, captured by the demanding narratives. We undertake to stimulate the global economy through long-distance telephone calls, faxes, photocopying, and massive express mailings.

São Paulo, July 1992: Another conference. David has finished his plenary. Kathi, who is sick and worried about her own plenary, is fidgeting and sniffing during Donald Freeman's presentation. About the third time Donald says, "You have to know the story to tell the story," Kathi regains consciousness through an antihistamine fog and realizes (unbeknownst to the speaker himself) that she is listening to one of the recurrent themes of the book. She accosts Donald after his talk and asks if he has promised the paper to anyone else. He is amused but cautious.

David and Kathi keep working at a distance. When we do meet at the California TESOL conference, we spend an afternoon at Kathi's office, trying to frame the contents for the book, shuffling and reshuffling the chapters. But we are stuck, unable to find easily divisible units in what has become a curiously textured web: There are too many connections. At the end of the conference, when Denise Murray quotes students' essays and poems during her plenary about diversity, we realize that hers must be the final chapter, the exclamation point, the "Amen!"

Atlanta, April 1993: The TESOL Convention again. (Has a whole year slipped by?) The pressure is really on now. We have some terrific papers by language teachers, learners, and researchers from around the globe. We send the manuscript to Cambridge University Press. They are definitely interested, but input from the reviewers sends us back to the drawing board and the chapters back to the authors: rethink, revise, rewrite.

Baltimore, March 1994: The TESOL Convention again. (Has *another* whole year slipped by?) David leads a colloquium based on the collection. Some of our authors meet one another (and us) for the first time. The word processing, faxing, and photocopying continue endlessly.

Washington, D.C., October 1994: We have to cut 250 pages from the manuscript. All the authors revise their papers *again*. Kathi eliminates adjectives and adverbs, trying desperately to delete lines of text, thereby deleting half-filled pages.

Monterey, December 1994: It's raining and raining. Kathi is printing out page after page, correcting punctuation and misplaced headings. (Please, *please* don't let the power go out or the computer go down.)

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David faxes from Hong Kong, “Calm down, smile, stick the manuscript in the mail and convene a meeting of the Parched Throat Society.”

Then suddenly – it’s done. Two quiet reams of paper, waiting to be mailed. We are tempted to revel in metaphors about “harmonious voices in a chorus” to describe the resulting book. But we know a more appropriate audio-image is the clamor spilling from the open door of a room full of language learners, engaged in the purposeful cacophony of group work. There is much to be learned by listening to these voices from the language classroom.

Kathleen M. Bailey  
David Nunan

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## Acknowledgments

Every author and editor feels that chapters in books ought to have some mechanism, beyond the printed page, for dealing with acknowledgments: something like that incredible moment of triumph in a motion picture theater when the theme music comes up and the credits roll across the screen, and every person even remotely connected with the film is acknowledged. But we are left with the print medium, in these acknowledgments, to thank the people behind the scenes – those whose work has helped these voices to be heard:

At the Monterey Institute of International Studies, Mary Davis, Julie Loreno, and Bea Williams, who photocopied, express mailed, and faxed enough pages to lay a path from Monterey to Sydney and on to Hong Kong; Sheryl Black and Christy MacAnally, whose flying fingers generated the correspondence to authors and publishers; and Robert Gard, President of the Monterey Institute, who provided a grant for clerical support that helped us finish.

At Macquarie University in Sydney, Mark Gregory and Ken Willing, whose combined computer wizardry turned multiple diskettes and a bizarre international assortment of word processing programs into a single relatively workable system.

At Cambridge University Press in the U.K., Colin Hayes, who was excited about the project from the very beginning; and in New York, Mary Vaughn, who encouraged us and helped us synthesize provocative input from the reviewers; and the reviewers themselves, who commented in helpful detail on various iterations of the manuscript.

Jennifer Tuman, our first incredible assistant editor, whose keen eye for detail, word processing skills, and knowledge of the field generated the cleanest final draft we have ever seen; and Aileen Gum, our second incredible assistant editor (can there be two such creatures?), whose initiative, calm reliability, and writer's ear saw us through the final revision stages. Finally, Diane Malamut came into our lives just in time to help with the tedious task of indexing.

And, of course, we thank the authors for their contributions, and in particular, their willingness to develop, revise, and trim the stories. We hope the resulting collection will inform, amuse, and inspire language teachers, potential language teachers, language students, and other interested readers around the world.