



# Introduction

In his classic book, *Teaching Languages: A Way and Ways* (Newbury House/Heinle 1980), Earl Stevick describes the human dimension in language teaching. He writes: “There can, after all, be ‘learning’ without ‘teaching’ but one cannot claim to have ‘taught’ unless someone else has learned.” (p 16) This basic dilemma captures the essence of the School for International Training’s (SIT’s) approach to language teacher education and the focus of this series: When teaching is based on learning, then ‘learning tells you how to teach’. Since its founding in 1962 as the first training center for US Peace Corps, SIT has applied these principles to the process of learning to teach languages. Now, in partnership with McGraw-Hill, we are pleased to explore how this rich experience plays out in published materials.

In the *School for International Training Frameworks for Language Teaching*, the authors, who are SIT faculty and trainers, examine teachers and learners as complex individuals who bring their own ideas, principles, and experiences to the classroom. Drawing on who they are, what they know and believe, what they “see” and feel capable of doing, teachers and learners each make literally thousands of decisions, any of which can affect what happens in the classroom and thus the quality of learning. The challenge is to make sense of this range of opportunities and flow of decisions.

We believe that teachers have great influence over learning, although they cannot control it. It is impossible for a teacher to *make* students learn; the student is the only person who can actually make learning happen. The teacher can strive to create an environment and circumstances that help students do the learning. In other words, teachers make decisions that heavily influence learning, but they do not cause it.

Similarly, as a reader of this series and a professional learner of teaching, no one can tell you what to do unless you accept the ideas they offer. Therefore, the authors do not tell you what you should do. No matter what they know about language teaching, the authors do not know you, your teaching situation, or your students. The series offers our view of the key issues and ideas on each topic, along with ways to try these out in the classroom. And, most critically, it asks you to think carefully about what happens in your classroom when you try these things out. In essence, we propose a partnership: your experience coupled with the authors’ expertise.

## **How to read this book**

The authors use the reflective cycle of ‘what’- ‘so what’- ‘now what’ to provide a structure for professional learning that can guide your thinking as you read this book. First you meet the *what*: ideas, which may be new or familiar. Then you examine the *so what*: why these ideas could matter to you as a teacher; how they might serve you in reasoning about what you do. This leads to *now what* as you try out versions of the ideas to see what they could mean in your classroom.

## **Learning from your classroom experience**

The reading process encourages and supports you to use the reflective process as a tool to examine what happens in your classroom when you try out the different ideas you encounter. Reflection provides a disciplined way of thinking about what happens in your classroom, why it may have happened, and what can be done next. In this basic process of description, analysis, and action planning, you can generate principled options for your classroom. These options provide the basis for action plans as you continue working with your students.

As you read each book, you become a professional partner in examining your teaching. The process is simple and profound:

- You start with your experiences, and you ground what you know in research and educational theories.
- During this process, you recognize your beliefs in relation to those of experts.
- Knowing what you believe gives you an ‘informed’ basis from which to make your own decisions in the classroom.
- ‘Informed’ means that you are aligning what you do with what you believe.
- Since teaching does not cause learning, the relation between what you believe and what you do is tested regularly by what and how your individual students learn.

In *Understanding Teaching through Learning*, Josh Kurzweil explores three themes. First, he looks at a variety of factors that can affect student learning. This investigation provides the foundation for the second theme, designing learning experiences. In the last theme, he works with some of the nuts and bolts of classroom teaching by asking how to support these learning experiences. We believe the issues discussed in this volume apply to a broad range of teaching situations, both in and beyond the language classroom.

## **Becoming a learner of teaching**

As a professional learner of teaching, when you become more conscious of your options, you see a fuller range of opportunities in each classroom situation, and your decisions reflect those possibilities. You become a decision-maker, and your decisions are informed by a close and careful examination of what happens when you make them. While teaching does not make learning happen, it certainly does influence it. We believe that you will develop as a teacher as you make decisions and assess how these decisions work for your learners in your classroom.

Donald Freeman and Kim Lier  
School for International Training