



Strategies for Teaching Assistant and International Teaching Assistant Development: Beyond Micro Teaching

Catherine Ross, Jane Dunphy & Associates; Jossey-Bass, 2007.

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Microteaching -- short lessons by teaching novices, often recorded, and followed by analysis with experienced teachers -- lies at the heart of many teaching assistant program efforts. And why not? A competent video analysis of fifteen minutes of one's teaching can reveal (sometimes in stark detail) what has worked, what has not, and provides an opportunity for meaningful discussion of what could enhance one's instructional techniques. Microteaching is also efficient. The experience may return more for the development "dollar" than any other single TA training practice. No wonder it is often an institution's first response to teaching assistants', and particularly international TAs', developmental needs. Does microteaching, however, adequately prepare teaching assistants for teaching in the American classroom?

In *Strategies for Teaching Assistant and International Teaching Assistant Development: Beyond Micro Teaching*, Catherine Ross and Jane Dunphy claim that microteaching does *not*. As a TA training approach, the process rarely enhances cultural awareness, poorly addresses student motivation, and only cursorily covers classroom management issues. Above all, microteaching fails to develop complex communications skills TAs need to teach successfully. *Strategies* offers readers forty-five workable (and low-cost) approaches to developing communication skills that the authors believe all teaching assistants need to teach effectively. Drawn from TA programs and the advice of experienced developers from across the United States, the book provides both new and experienced developers useful tools for enhancing their approaches. *Strategies* also prompts us to consider deeper questions about the nature of teaching assistant training in the United States. Chief among those questions: Are traditional divisions between ITA and TA programs limiting development efforts?

Strategies works best as a perusable resource from which readers can select a wide range of teaching assistant training activities. Each activity includes goals, estimated time for preparation and execution, procedural instructions, and when necessary, materials needed. Many contributors offer supplemental resources and suggest variations to adapt each activity to different audiences and contexts. Several plans also come with common assumptions developers should consider when instituting the activity. Ross and Dunphy divide *Strategies* primarily into two parts: TA and ITA Development. Presumably meant for teaching assistants for whom English is their first language, *Part I: TA Development* takes a building-basics-to-developing-advanced-techniques approach, culminating in a short section addressing professional development strategies. It features activities that develop TAs' group- and active-learning skills, addresses teaching in a variety of contexts (including technology use), and encourages TAs to consider professional development as an on-going means for teaching reflection. Particularly useful activities in *Part I* include Breslow and Schuster's "Problems, Pitfalls, and Surprises in Teaching: Mini Cases;" Bauer's "Blended Learning: Focusing on Effective Teaching through Online Discussions and Concept Mapping;" and Decker's "ASPECT: Advancing Students' Professional Development Excellence with Certificates in Teaching Series," a description of a University of Texas at Austin program.

Part II: ITA Development activities center on the well-established Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) developmental triumvirate: culture, pedagogy, and language. Part II's se-

lections focus largely on translating cultural awareness into effective teaching practice. Ross and Dunphy identify microteaching's key limitation at the beginning of this section: It generally fails to produce reflective practitioners. The authors emphasize that the key to effective international TA teaching development is fostering ITAs' awareness of their own assumptions about themselves as teachers. That realization greatly expands ITAs' opportunities for making effective organizational, linguistic, and facilitative adaptations to the American classroom. Janet Goodwin's deceptively simple formula for spurring reflection, "Working with Authentic TA Discourse," well represents this section.

A useful guide to TA development and long overdue, *Strategies for Teaching Assistant and International Teaching Assistant Development: Beyond Micro Teaching* provides readers with helpful tips for improving their developmental practice. The work might also prompt readers to question the nature of TA/ITA development and development publishing. One of Dunphy's own contributions, "Stand and Deliver: Developing Impromptu Speaking Skills," begs a key question concerning the future of our enterprise: Are not the crucial cultural frames that TESOL brings to international TA development applicable to everyone? Without considering new paradigms to shape the approaches we have traditionally used, "formulaic" tips-focused guides can suffer readers to experience the same dilemmas in practice that microteaching itself presents: They limit developmental potential. Given its organization, Ross and Dunphy's work looks reassuringly familiar to us. Fortunately, *Strategies'* traditional arrangement also pushes us to consider that all teaching, like communication, is culturally bound. Perhaps our comfortable decisions about what we do and how we do it need rethinking.



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