REVIEW OF *TEACHERS UNDERSTANDING TEACHING: A MULTIMEDIA HYPERTEXT TOOL*

Title	*Teachers Understanding Teaching: A Multimedia Hypertext Tool*
Author	Karen Johnson and Glenn Johnson
Series	TeacherSource
Platform	Macintosh or PC
Hardware requirements	**Macintosh**: 68030 Macintosh with 4 MB RAM available (8 MB recommended); System 7.0 or later; 13" color monitor (640 x 480) with Color 8 bit, 256 colors; Macintosh CD-ROM 180 KB/second transfer rate, or faster. **Windows**: 386/33 megahertz or better; 4 MB RAM available (8 MB recommended); 13" color monitor (640 x 480) with Color 8 bit, 256 colors; double-speed or faster CD-ROM. Windows NT does not support the progress tracking system.
Publisher	Heinle and Heinle 20 Park Plaza Boston, MA 02116
Support	70-page manual; online help
Year of Publication	1998
Version	1.01
Target audience	Language teachers in pre-service or in-service professional development programs
Price	$68.95
ISBN	083846356-8

Reviewed by Suzanne Scott, California State University, Humboldt

OVERVIEW

Readers involved in language teacher education are likely to be interested in *Teachers Understanding Teaching,* which explores teachers' ideas about teaching and includes footage and discussion of video clips of three actual ESL classrooms in the US. The classes cover a range of levels: a 4th-5th grade content-based ESL science course, a 7th-8th grade language and literature class, and a pre-university IEP class.

Like other materials in the TeacherSource Series, *Teachers Understanding Teaching* contains three main strands: Voices, Frameworks, and Investigations. Voices provides an insider's view of teaching, with excerpts from interviews with the teachers on their knowledge and beliefs about L2 teaching and learning. Frameworks presents an outsider's perspective, with information about theoretical issues gleaned from research on teaching and teachers. Investigations bridges theory and practice, showing excerpts from actual classroom instruction, organized around instructional considerations, and accompanied by the teachers' commentary on the excerpts. A Tasks section provides 35 activities to further users' understanding of concepts presented in the three strands. The goal of the program, to be used within a professional development language teaching program, is to help present and future teachers make sense of what they do in classrooms and why.

DESCRIPTION

Teachers Understanding Teaching opens with a choice of the three strands: Voices, Frameworks, and Investigations, each of which also has a number of subsections to explore. The Voices strand includes five sections called "Understandings": Second Language Learning, Students, TESOL, Memories of Teachers, and Beliefs (see Figure 1). Users access excerpts from the interviews by first selecting a topic to explore,

and then choosing one of the three teachers. Further information is available in Key Concepts, which can also be accessed from a pull-down menu available in all strands.

Figure 1. Voices main menu

Frameworks contains four "Research Issues": Learning to Teach, Teachers' Knowledge, Teacher Decision Making, and Teachers' Beliefs. In this strand, users click on a topic, and are shown a filing cabinet with tabbed files indicating references (e.g., Johnson, 1998); these references discuss ideas which theoreticians and researchers feel are important in teaching. Teachers' Beliefs, for example, has 12 tabbed files, each file containing a short quote from one citation relevant to the topic of teachers' beliefs. Each quote has the full reference available, as well as an annotation of the article or book. A few of the quotes also have comments on the topic from one or more of the three teachers. Key concepts are bolded, and when the cursor rolls over them, a definition of the concept is provided. Frameworks also has an Author Map, which gives a one-screen overview of this section.

The third strand, Investigations, is perhaps the most interesting. It offers the user eight cognitive, social, and affective "Instructional Considerations" to explore: Curriculum Investigations, Subject Matter Content, Language Skills, Motivation and Involvement, Strategy, Management, Student Understanding, and Affective Needs. As with the Voices section, users select a topic, and then choose one of the three teachers. In Investigations, however, instead of an interview on the chosen topic, we step inside the teacher's classroom by watching video footage of the teacher in action. A short summary explains the context, for example, "Elizabeth provides an introduction to a reading skills activity." The teacher's after-the-fact commentary on the classroom excerpt is provided as well. Transcripts of the teachers' comments are available, but there are no transcripts of classroom talk.
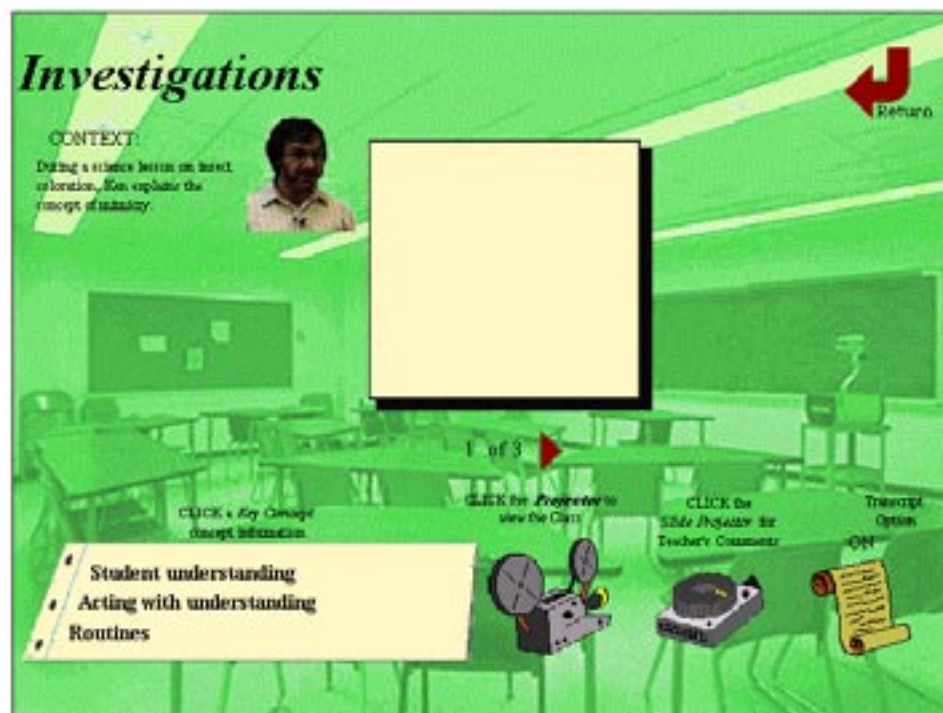
Figure 2. Investigations: Ken on student understanding

A pull-down menu available in all strands provides information on the three teachers, such as their background in language learning and their professional development. In all three strands, an Information icon gives a quick overview of the strand, and a Reflections icon provides a basic text environment with prompts to guide reflective writing, which can be saved to floppy or hard disk. A Bulletin Board is designed to encourage discussions among class members. The Bulletin Board is not a networked communication system; users must use the same terminal to communicate with each other. A Tasks section provides 35 activities to further understanding, organized by strand or by purpose (e.g., tasks conducted outside or inside the classroom, tasks that foster collaboration). The tasks indicate their purpose, provide directions for users to do the task, and have users return to Investigations to examine how the three teachers accomplish the same task. A Progress tracking tool lets signed-in users know what parts of the CD they have viewed.

Figure 3. Task 2: Exploring commonly held conceptions of teachers and teaching

DISCUSSION

One of the most attractive aspects of *Teachers Understanding Teaching* is related to one of its primary shortcomings. The CD includes a wealth of information and approaches to the complex world of language teacher education, and the result can be … well, messy. For example, the 70-page manual tells us that we can move through the CD in a number of different ways -- for example, by choosing one teacher and accessing all of that teacher's views and excerpts, or by selecting one of the three strands and viewing everything in that strand. Yet both of these approaches feel disjointed. Despite the careful layout of strands and considerations under each strand, I felt at times as if I were dropping in on conversations or written discussions of which I'd missed the beginning. While the words and concepts made sense in and of themselves, I wasn't always sure why I was listening to, or reading, any given bit at any given time. After viewing multiple screens, users may feel they've entered a whirling kaleidoscope of information, and they may not know what section to focus on next, or how one aspect ties in with another. As a result, instructors introducing this program to students ought to carefully plan their way through the CD, explicitly stressing linkages and providing coherence.

Another major strength of the CD is the video clips of actual ESL classrooms, accompanied by commentary from the teachers. Unfortunately, the screen showing the videos is only approximately one-eighth the size of the computer screen, so the images can be quite small. Nonetheless, this footage is valuable, as are the teachers' accompanying explanations of various aspects of their teaching. Together, this information provides an ideal arena for discussion with teachers-in-training, including the match -- or lack of match -- between what the teachers say they are doing in a given clip, and how it might appear to the viewer. For example, in one clip, a teacher's behavior seemed to this viewer to be somewhat gruff and condescending towards her students. Yet the teacher's commentary on that excerpt indicated that she felt her behavior was supportive and encouraging. The contrast between our disparate interpretations of this video clip provides fertile grounds for discussion and highlights the risk involved in making assumptions

about a teacher after seeing only an isolated segment of teaching. Teaching is, as Johnson notes in the accompanying manual (p. 3), a highly contextualized activity, and this CD provides the opportunity to hear the teacher's perspective and to view multiple clips of the same class.

SUMMARY

Teachers Understanding Teaching: A Multimedia Hypertext Tool provides a useful means for exploring what teachers actually do in classrooms, and how their beliefs are reflected in their actions. While users may be frustrated by the lack of coherence as they move within and among the strands, the CD is likely to be beneficial nonetheless. It shows connections between teachers' belief systems and their teaching; it lets teachers speak for themselves about their own teaching; it gathers together, from research on teaching and teachers, quotations for consideration; and it gives us footage of classrooms and commentary explaining the rationale behind teaching choices. I would recommend that language teacher educators take the time to examine *Teachers Understanding Teaching: A Multimedia Hypertext Tool* and that they consider including it in their professional development programs for language teachers.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER:

Suzanne Scott is an Assistant Professor at California State University, Humboldt. Her research interests include language teaching and language learning, as well as issues in interpersonal communication.

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