Book reviews

TEACHING ENGLISH TO SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN ACADEMIC CONTEXTS- READING, WRITING, LISTENING AND SPEAKING

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New York: Routledge, 2018

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This book fills a much-needed gap in language–skill development of English language learners in the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking in English for Academic purposes. It provides English language teachers with relevant and useful research and offers a comprehensive, easy to read theoretically principled, evidence based, practical reference book. This book offers support for English language teachers, both practicing and pre-service, curriculum designers and material writers. Whilst aimed at US post-secondary English language learning context, this book offers a relevant, principled, theoretical account of language skill development to guide teachers in pedagogic decision making for the Australian secondary school context and Australian tertiary education context.

Skills-based teaching is at the core of English language teaching and this book explores the notions that successful skill development requires:

- explicit teacher input to build student motivation for learning
- the systematic development of opportunities for meaningful language use and knowledge of the language system
- metacognitive awareness training to be an integral part of skills-based teaching.

The four skills (modes) of **reading, writing, listening** and **speaking** in English for academic purposes provide the focus for the four sections of the book. Each skill (mode) is elucidated by way of explanation of successful strategies and relevant research about successful skill performance. The pedagogical focus for each of the four skills addresses principles and practical steps for

building a skill based curriculum, instructional activities, and assessment options. For teacher discussion and reflection, this book offers thought-provoking tasks.

Reading Comprehension

The chapters designated to reading comprehension note that having a *purpose for reading* is the foundation for everything we do when we read. Academic reading tasks entail reading to find answers to questions, to learn new ideas and related details, to develop expertise, to synthesise information from across a long text or multiple texts, to look for evidence for an argument or position, and to critique someone's ideas. Each purpose requires a different approach to reading and the authors offer many engaging and relevant activities and strategies.

As reading comprehension is a complex cognitive and contextually supported ability, it is highly beneficial to the secondary English language teacher to discover that the chapter on *'Building an effective Reading Curriculum'* offers sound lesson-planning ideas, teaching strategies, and assessment in language-teaching settings. The authors recommend that making a commitment to vocabulary teaching, in particular, the judicial selection of lexical items to explicitly teach is foundational to students' reading success. This book also outlines four simple steps to train strategic readers; to produce skilled and confident readers.

It is also interesting to note, the authors offer an insightful discussion on how digital reading varies from print reading; highlighting that for digital contexts, students need to learn to navigate, effectively and efficiently, multiple websites which searching for information; to understand which keywords and descriptors to use for informational website searches.

Writing

The chapters designated to explore writing outline the challenges faced by L2 writers. These challenges include a lack of fluency; a lack of accuracy and complexity (the linguistic tools of vocabulary and grammar with which to express their ideas clearly, precisely, and effectively); a lack of cultural knowledge; and due to these various knowledge and experience gaps, a lack of confidence. Having a grasp on content, an understanding of the rhetorical situation (which includes the purpose for writing, and knowledge and expectations of the audience) is key to successful L2 writing. With these issues in mind, this book offers a plethora of practical

suggestions for planning courses and curriculum for L2 writers and for classroom instruction, including many ideas about feedback to writers, and writing assessment.

The section on *'Differences across writing systems'* and *'The role of the L1 when writing in L2'* are extremely valuable for the English language teacher. These sections contrast the benefits of draft writing in L1 and revising this to find the appropriate and equivalent L2; and the counterproductive argument where a student composes in L1 and attempts to *translate* the text into L2 which can lead to grammatical errors, unidiomatic, strange-sounding prose and even incomprehensible texts. This section offers a very interesting commentary.

The L2 writers sub-group characteristics for International Students, Immigrant Students and Generation 1.5 Students are outlined and explained. The questions for discussion offered on how to differentiate L2 instruction for each of these subgroups are highly relevant to the Australian secondary and tertiary education settings; and are challenging and thought-provoking.

A historical overview on the approaches to teaching L1 and L2 composition include: *focus on form* (sentence, paragraph and essay level); *Focus on the writer* (where writing is a process involving multiple drafting opportunities with feedback between drafts); *Focus on the content* (text organization and language forms); *Focus on context* (Genre pedagogy- a range of genres and subgenres for every subject area and the expectations of the target audience).

The authors also note current writing trends and offer a rich array of language development strategies to specifically focus on the agency of the students. That is, how they can become more aware of and proactive about steps they need to take to gain better language control and to apply new linguistic knowledge to their writing.

The section on teacher feedback for L2 compositions explains many options in plain English and gives suggestions on how to write clear and useful commentary to our students.

Listening
The Listening chapters in this book are most beneficial for the Australian secondary teacher in that they give a detailed account of how listening comprehension works; giving insight into explicit teaching of listening strategies particularly useful for the NSW Stage 6 English EALD course, which has a compulsory Listening Assessment as part of the NSW HSC examination. These chapters walk through the theoretical bases for teaching listening and

outline the fundamentals of top-down and bottom-up processing, and the benefits of both.

These listening chapters may need to be re-read as they are dense with research and referencing, but the effort would be worthwhile as they offer profound insight into the following factors for listening success:

- cognitive factors (L2 vocabulary knowledge, syntactic knowledge, discourse knowledge, pragmatic knowledge, metacognitive knowledge, prior knowledge, L1 listening ability, L1 vocabulary, auditory discrimination and working memory)
- affective factors (anxiety, self-efficacy and motivation)

Speaking

The speaking chapters focus on the importance of spoken communication skills for student transitioning into academic study in English, which are essential for students' participation in and learning through academic discourse. Secondary and tertiary education settings require full intellectual and social participation where it is expected that a student engage in discussions and Q&A segments in lectures and classes, participation in tutorials or workshops, team based lab work in the sciences, and project work in a wide range of disciplines. The authors discuss the increase in collaborative, interactive forms of learning in which talk is central. They note 'flipped' classrooms, where students independently, and in their own time, access resources online; and class time is used for discursive modes of learning such as discussions, Q&A sessions and problem and project based learning tasks.

The speaking chapters focus on three aspects of speaking relevant to the language classroom:

- interactional speaking
- corrective feedback
- controlled and communicative practice.

It is suggested that spoken language in itself, allows for some tolerance in the range of 'acceptable' varietal features, especially of pronunciation and prosody. The authors posit that the goal of pronunciation teaching for most English language learners, should be *intelligibility* rather than accent reduction.

The chapters on speaking skills offer a comprehensive account of understanding how speech production works and identifies three broad processes:

- *conceptualisation* (establishing a communicative goal and intended meaning)

- *formulation* (selecting the linguistic forms for expressing the intended message- including words and formulaic sequences and grammatical structures)
- *articulation* (where learners convert planned material into speech.

As these processes occur in real time and under communicative pressure a consequence may be that an English language learner's speech may, for example, be marked by hesitation and false starts, by grammatical errors, or by a limited range of syntactic structures.

The authors highlight the clear pedagogical implications in these three broad processes: the need for teachers to select, design, implement speaking tasks in ways which are cognizant of the strain that speaking can put on attentional resources and the trade-off between accuracy and complexity when the task is too demanding. Two of the most widely researched options for teachers are to give learners planning time or opportunities for task rehearsal or repetition.

The section for corrective feedback gives examples of each type of feedback (explicit correction, metalinguistic feedback, clarification request, recast and elicitation -prompt). Whilst warning against over-correction the authors note the valuable role of corrective feedback and offer a range of discussion questions tasks for the teacher to reflect on corrective feedback opportunities in their educational setting.

The guidelines for building an effective speaking curriculum focus on integration rather than isolation. A whole chapter is designated to providing excellent strategies and activities to use in the classroom.

Recommendation

This book is a treasure. It comprehensively fills a gap in English language learning literature (for academic purposes). It brings together relevant research, English language learning theories and thought-provoking approaches for professional discourse. The classroom strategies and activities are easy to follow and systematically support the research and the various theoretical stances.

English language teachers, both practicing and pre-service, curriculum designers and material writers should find room on their bookshelves for this one.