

REVIEW

\*\*\*

RESENSIE

Jack C Richards and Willy A Renandya (Eds). *Methodology in Language Teaching: An Anthology of Current Practice*. Cambridge University Press. 239pp

According to the authors, '[t]his book seeks to provide an overview of current approaches, issues, and practices in the teaching of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). It has the following goals:

- to provide a comprehensive overview of the field of second and foreign language teaching, with a particular focus on issues related to the teaching of English
- to provide a source of teaching principles and classroom activities which teachers can refer to in their work
- to provide a source of readings and activities that can be used in TESOL teacher-education programs, for both preservice and in-service courses' (p. 1).

Unlike another recent Cambridge publication (Carter and Nunan, 2001), the focus is on practical and planning issues rather than academic issues. In doing so it sets its net as widely as possible to cover the needs of teachers, whether native speakers of English or not or teaching in formal or informal settings in the many and varied settings in which English is taught throughout the world.

For the authors the key issues centre on

- understanding learners and their roles, rights, needs, motivations, strategies, and the processes they employ in second language learning
- understanding the nature of language teaching and learning and the roles teachers, teaching methods, and teaching materials play in facilitating successful learning
- understanding how English functions in the lives of learners, the way the English language works, the particular difficulties it poses for second language learners, and how learners can best achieve their goals in learning English
- understanding how schools, classrooms, communities, and the language teaching profession can best support the teaching and learning of English. (p2 )

Only three of the articles have not been published previously. What Richards and Renandya have done is to compile recent seminal articles (70% published since 1996) that cover the range of issues which normally forms part of TESOL methodology courses. There are nine topics: the nature of teaching, classroom interaction and management, teaching the skills, understanding learner variables, addressing linguistic competence, curriculum factors, assessment of learning, the role of technology, and teacher development. The sixteen sections contain 41 chapters, with at least two chapters in each of them. These attempt to address theory and practice in an interactive way: the ways in which theory can shape and inform practice and the ways in which the realities of the classroom can inform theory and research. The articles also challenge established practice and even new orthodoxies. For instance, in

Section 11: *Teaching Vocabulary*, Paul Nation (“Best practice in vocabulary teaching and learning”) contests the view that all vocabulary learning should be in context (p. 271).

In my view, there is a good balance between authors who have established themselves as leaders in the field (like Nunan, Ellis, Stempelski) and those whose work in areas beyond the United States and Europe allows the book to offer a wider perspective (Hingle and Linington, Tsang and Wong).

Another strength of the book is that it implicitly and explicitly encourages reflective practice. In the introduction that precedes each section, there are two sets of questions. The pre-reading questions encourage readers to reflect on their own beliefs, assumptions and practical experience before reading the articles. The post-reading questions lead readers in critical reflection on the chapters and on likely application to their own teaching situations.

In what follows, I will outline some of the sections as a means of exploring what the book has to offer teacher educators and preservice and in-service teachers.

In the first section, *Approaches to teaching*, Brown and Richards argue the need for coherent practice. Brown argues for a systematic but more open approach than a method would allow. For him an answer lies in a set of twelve principles which inform pedagogy. Richards, on the other hand, explores three conceptions of teaching: science research conceptions, theory-philosophy conceptions and art-craft conceptions. His suggestion that they be seen as a continuum, which can serve the needs of teachers as they progress from inexperience to a point where they seek personal and particular solutions to situated problems is a useful one.

The other fifteen sections all offer more directed attention to specific aspects of teaching. Sections 2 and 3 offer practical guidance to aspects of classroom management such as lesson planning, cooperative teaching and multi-level teaching. The two chapters in Section 2, which were written for this volume, offer a practical, accessible and coherent framework. These would not only be of interest to preservice teachers but also teachers in South Africa who are still in the process of making a paradigm shift.

Section 4 (*Syllabus Design and Instructional Material*) is one of the most useful in the book. Denise Finney deftly explores key concepts and notions relating to the ELT curriculum. Her illuminating analysis highlights the difficulties which stand in the way of a coherent model for ELT planning and development. In the chapter on materials, Crawford presents a complex picture of the challenges confronting the textbook writer.

The textbook writer’s challenge is to provide materials which support, even challenge teachers and learners, and present ideas for tasks and the presentation of language input without becoming prescriptive and undermining the teacher’s and the learner’s autonomy. It is a fine balancing act. (p. 88)

At the same time the teacher has to meet the challenge of teaching with not through materials (cf Wright 1987) so that the learners’ needs within the unique situation remain central.

Another section I found particularly good was the one on listening (Section 10: *Teaching Listening*). Although more attention is being given to it now than was the case, listening tends to be neglected or done in a rather eclectic way. Nunan, Field and Lam usefully offer a framework for reviewing listening practice. In line with perspectives on reading, Nunan

emphasizes the need for bottom-up as well as top-down activities as well as the need to develop learner strategies; Field critiques the limitations of a three stage approach to listening activities, pre-listening, listening and post-listening, which focuses much more on testing and tends to select artificial listening activities; Lam focuses on the need to expose learners to genuine spoken language so that learners will be able to operate successfully in real-world communication. In each case, they explore the complexities of the arguments they offer, but also offer practical suggestions for enhancing opportunities to develop listening in the classroom..

The book is a rich resource of current thinking on and leading edge practice in teaching English to speakers of other languages. It would be invaluable core reading for teacher education courses.

E Ridge  
Division of English  
Faculty of Education  
University of Stellenbosch

## **REFERENCES**

- Carter, R and Nunan, D (Eds). 2001. *The Cambridge Guide to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wright, A. 1987. *Roles of teachers and learners*. Oxford: OUP.