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KEY ISSUES IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

JACK C. RICHARDS



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And so now, it's over to you!

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Introduction

This book is a response to the need for a comprehensive text that explores key issues in English language teaching today. The current status of English as an international language has enormous implications for people worldwide. English is not only the language of international communication, commerce and trade, and of media and pop culture, but increasingly, in countries where it was taught in the past as a second or foreign language, a medium of instruction for some or all subjects in schools, colleges and universities. English is no longer viewed as the property of countries where it is the mother tongue of much of the population such as the United States, Australia or the United Kingdom, or of countries such as Nigeria, India, Singapore and the Philippines where it is used alongside other local languages; it is an international language that reflects many new contexts and purposes for its use, as well as the different identities of its users.

Parallel to the changes we have witnessed in the status of English in the last 30 or more years have been new developments in the language-teaching profession itself. The spread of English has brought with it the demand by national educational authorities for new language-teaching policies: for the development of standards for English teaching as well as teacher preparation, for new approaches to curriculum design, teaching and assessment and for greater central control over teaching and teacher education. The discipline of teaching English to speakers of other languages, variously referred to as TESOL, ESOL, ELT (English language teaching), ESL (English as a second language) and EFL (English as a foreign language) continually revises its theories, principles and practices, through the efforts of applied linguists and specialists in the field of second language acquisition, advancements in language-teaching methodology and enhancements in language-teacher education, as well as through the practices of creative and skilled classroom practitioners. This knowledge base has expanded enormously in both breadth and depth in recent years, as research and theory add to what we know or understand about the teaching and learning of English. It is important for teachers to understand these developments so that they can review their own understanding of language teaching and learning and consider innovations and developments in classroom practices that may be relevant to their own teaching contexts.

Factors such as these require a rethinking of many of our assumptions about the teaching of English. Because of the changing needs for English-language skills among today's learners and the many different motivations that learners bring to the learning of English, English teachers today need both a broad and flexible range of teaching skills, as well as an understanding of the complex and developing knowledge base that supports the language-teaching profession.

Key Issues in Language Teaching thus provides an account of the issues that are involved in the teaching of English as a second or foreign language and describes approaches to the teaching of English, in light of the issues mentioned above. The book covers a wide

range of territory, but aims to address the most important issues and topics that teachers in training generally encounter in their teacher-education courses or that practising teachers will find useful if they wish to review their own understanding and approaches. My goal has been to cover the issues in an accessible style, with key points in each chapter summarized after every section. The book does not assume a prior background in applied linguistics. It is accessible to those undertaking courses in TESOL and applied linguistics at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. It is designed to be used as a core text in TESOL teacher-education programmes, as well as a reference for the many practising teachers interested in accounts of contemporary issues involved in teaching English today. The issues covered are those that, in my experience, are of concern to all teachers and teacher educators, and include such diverse areas as language-learning theories and methodology, the language learner and lesson planning, the teaching of the four skills, testing and assessment, and the role of technology. Throughout the book, I have tried to keep the focus on practical classroom issues, although where relevant, I have linked these issues to theory and research that can inform them. The chapters may be read in any order, and cross-references direct the reader to other chapters offering more background on selected topics.

This book puts each classroom issue into context and considers the implications that current understanding has on the decisions made in the classroom. The book is equally appropriate for readers new to a given topic, as well as those who wish to refresh their understanding, and seeks to present a broad and in-depth overview of the issues. Reflective questions throughout each chapter, vignettes provided by practicing teachers in different parts of the world and discussion questions following the chapter are designed to help make connections to the reader's experience. Also offered are case studies, lesson plans and textbook lessons, with guided tasks that allow readers to apply the knowledge gained in a given chapter. Suggestions for further reading are also given at the end of each chapter.

The chapters are grouped into four parts, each addressing major themes of importance to teachers today and exploring the key issues within these areas. The first part, *'English language teaching today'*, serves as an introduction to the book as a whole. Its chapters provide an overview of the role of English in the world, theories of second language learning, an account of the main teaching approaches that are in current or recent use, and an account of the knowledge and skills base experienced teachers make use of in teaching. This section, with its overview of both second language learning and methodology, is equally useful to those wishing to review or expand their knowledge of the research on these topics, and to those encountering these topics for the first time.

The second part, *'Facilitating student learning'*, deals with the critical role learners play in language learning. It covers the attributes that influence their approach to learning, the structure of a language lesson and how to increase its effectiveness, the nature and function of classroom management strategies and the differences between teaching learners of different age groups. Each chapter seeks to provide the background knowledge as well as the conceptual tools that teachers can make use of in order to develop a learner-centred approach to teaching.

Introduction

Part three, '*Language and the four skills*', covers the systems and skills of English, with chapters on grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, listening, speaking, reading and writing, as well as the important role of discourse and pragmatics in both speech and writing. These chapters are equally relevant to those teaching single-skills courses, integrated-skills courses or any combination of skills that an institution may offer.

In the final part, '*The teacher's environment*', the focus is on the resources teachers use. The section begins with an overview of curriculum planning and course design and then examines the nature and use of textbooks, the integration of technology in language courses, testing and assessment, and the nature of professional development and how teachers can continue their teacher education.

Taken together, the four sections of this book aim to provide teachers and teachers in training with a foundation of essential knowledge and skills to support their teaching and ongoing career development.

This book is also available as an eBook. This is one of the first teacher's reference books from Cambridge University Press to be offered in an innovative electronic format. In addition to ease of access from computers, tablets and mobile phones, the eBook format allows readers to view short videos, where I summarize each of the chapters and the major sections of the book. Throughout the eBook there are also video interviews with teachers and educators on a range of topics, including classroom management, teaching vocabulary, testing and assessment, and professional development.