

## Book review

### **International perspectives on teaching the four skills in ELT: Listening, speaking, reading, writing**

Edited by Anne Burns and Joseph Siegel

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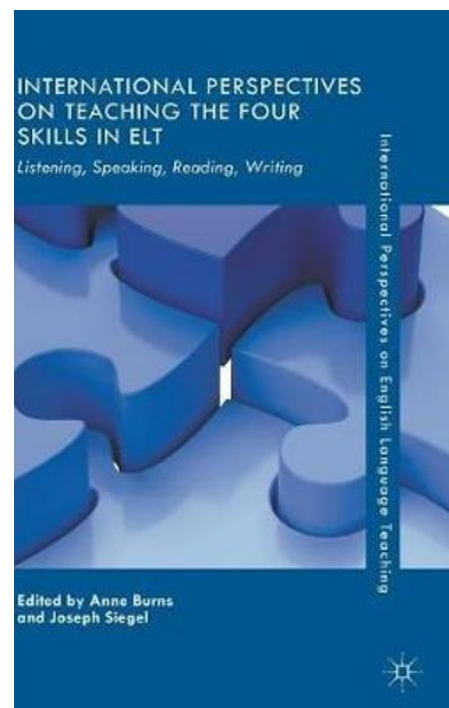
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As a student-teacher of English in Argentina taking my first steps into teacher research, I am interested in keeping up with the latest research in ELT. Thus, prior to reading this volume, I was drawn to it by the prospect of learning from what other teachers are doing in other contexts around the globe in order to improve their teaching practices which could, in turn, become a source of inspiration either for my own teaching practices or even research projects. After reading it my expectations were fulfilled and I closed the book with many new ideas that had caught my attention.

The volume consists of 18 chapters preceded by an introduction by Garton and Copland, editors of International Perspectives in ELT book series, who provide an overview of the myriad of teaching contexts presented throughout the volume. Furthermore, the readers are apprised of the issues dealt with by the different authors such as: innovative ways of implementing familiar aspects of teaching skills, practices and beliefs of teachers across contexts, accounts of investigations into the effectiveness of skills instructions, and the relationship between skills teaching and other aspects of language learner development.

In Chapter 1, the editors of the volume provide some ‘key theoretical and practical insights into the teaching of the four language skills’ (p.1). The chapter is divided into fundamental considerations of teaching the four skills and how they are intertwined, as well as why the editors have decided to place special attention to ‘practices that carefully and thoughtfully promote the learning of one particular skill’ (p.4). Then, they proceed to briefly



touch some of the main findings and practical implications of the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Following, the contributors to the volume are succinctly contextualized. Finally, the editors highlight five areas that they find particularly salient: the need to address more widely bottom-up processes and metacognition in skills teaching; the extent to which teachers' beliefs, experiences and professional opportunities influence the effectiveness of teaching skills; how innovative teaching of language skills is contextually based and locally interpreted; the role of creativity in local innovation in skills teaching; and the fact that the teaching of language skills needs to be embedded in sociocultural practices.

Chapters 2 to 17 are research-based accounts of practice on the four skills. Each chapter provides a concise yet comprehensive detail of the context and motives of each research project, as well as its findings, implications for teaching across contexts and questions for reflection for the readers to be able to transfer these findings to their own teaching contexts. Authors come from every continent and all sectors of education, from elementary to tertiary, public and private. Thus, a broad picture of current concerns and teaching practices is presented.

Part 1 (Chapters 2 to 5) focuses on listening skills. In Chapter 2 Santos and Graham explore teachers' stated beliefs and practices about listening and its pedagogy in order to assess the extent to which research-based perspectives are being taken into account in different parts of the world, with a focus on teaching listening as a process rather than as a product. Renandya and Hu present, in Chapter 3, a description of lower and higher level problems of listening that Chinese college students have, as well as pedagogical strategies that teachers are implementing to address these problems. Chapter 4 sheds light on how to develop a listening course for low level students with a focus on bottom-up strategies. The authors, McAuliffe and Brooks, direct the reader to a 2015 publication by Siegel and Siegel in which a case for bottom-up activities is made and which I had personally found quite enlightening. Finally, Tweedie and Johnson explore the importance of intelligibility in contexts in which accurate communication is paramount to safety, such as in healthcare or international aviation. Based on their study, the authors put forward four recommendations pertinent for the teaching of listening in these situations: raising awareness of listening comprehension problems in life-threatening situations, need for authentic material and simulated real-life scenarios, inclusion of frequent profession-specific vocabulary, and exposition to multiple accents.

Part 2 (Chapters 6 to 9) focuses on speaking skills. In Chapter 6, Tante describes the need for curriculum, material and teacher development for the teaching of speaking in inadequately resourced contexts such as primary schools in Cameroon, where traditional, teacher-centred methods are pervasive, with a preference for audio-lingual methods through rote-learning, focusing on accuracy. In Chapter 7, Philip Chappell presents a case for inquiry dialogue for the teaching of speaking skills in opposition to initiation-response-evaluation (IRE) and initiation-response-feedback (IRF), as the former encourages the interaction to

move forward, builds on the interlocutors' ideas and develops cumulative talk. In turn, in Chapter 8, Pang and Burri make a case for the Six Thinking Hats approach in order to develop dialogic speaking strategies, highlighting the fact that the method is useful for focusing not only on form but also on fluency and metacognitive strategies. In Chapter 9, Kozar reports on her findings on online speaking classes via Skype in which students' degree of satisfaction stems from the rapport with the teacher rather than from the use of materials, web cams or chats.

Part 3 (chapters 10 to 13) targets the teaching of reading skills. In Chapter 10, Vraštilová reflects on how authentic literature for children can support elementary students' reading skills by adapting them so as to provide sufficient scaffolding. The author argues that literary texts can be used as a source of language development as well as a means to increase literacy skills. Murtiningsih and Hapsari provide, in Chapter 11, pre-, while- and post-reading activities that they developed for university level students in Indonesia in order to encourage critical thinking and collaborative work, which proved more engaging and motivating than standard methods. Chapter 12, authored by Blaine West, presents an interesting view of learner autonomy as a social rather than as an individual process and thus advocates for building reading communities both inside and outside the classroom as a way of fostering learners' autonomy through choice and cohesion. In line with West, in Chapter 13 Roach recognizes reading literacy as a social practice and, as such, promotes a social practice approach to reading in which it is viewed as a 'social and cultural activity motivated by real-life goals and, most significantly, frequently involves talk around texts' (p. 187).

Part 4 (Chapters 14 to 17) focuses on writing skills. In Chapter 14, a focus on descriptive writing is examined by Hayik, who highlights the need to overcome language differences by Israeli college students whose first language is Arabic. The author introduces the possibility of reading aloud a culturally relevant book in order to inspire students to write similar pieces about their lives. In turn, Pham and Iwashita describe, in chapter 15, their effort to boost learner autonomy of Vietnamese students through the introduction of indirect corrective feedback (IDF). The aim of this type of feedback is to foster students' sense of responsibility and awareness of their own role in language learning, a considerable challenge in a teacher-centred context in which learners are viewed as passive receivers. In Chapter 16, Lam describes how implementing a portfolio assessment strategy may assist students develop their writing skills through self-reflection, as it was proved with secondary and college level students in Hong Kong. Finally, in Chapter 17, Villas Boas provides an account of how a process-genre writing pedagogy was adopted and adapted at a private ELT institute in Brazil. The author highlights the importance of continuing teacher development, as well as the fact that course books can be adapted and expanded in order to build a consistent process-genre writing curriculum.

The editors of the volume authored the closing chapter in which they describe the publication as a 'worldwide whirlwind tour (...) of what the teaching of each of the four

skills can look like in several countries' (p.249). Furthermore, they provide insight into how to adapt the experiences portrayed in the book to different contexts, both by understanding the context in which each innovation originated and, particularly, through action research.

Overall, this volume provides the reader with an idea of how different perspectives and approaches are possible when tackling teaching problems and how these innovations might be implemented across contexts. While the experiences depicted in the book are presented in a reader-friendly narrative, the diversity and length of the text might result confusing at times. Perhaps a brief overview could have been included so as to help the reader navigate the multiple experiences more easily. This volume may be interesting for teacher-educators who wish to equip their trainee-teachers with a global perspective on how the teaching of the 4 skills is approached in different contexts across cultures, as well as with an idea of how keeping updated on research can influence their continuous development. It might also be attractive to teacher researchers, as it could prove a practical resource for their own research projects.

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