

Book Review
**The State of the Profession in Today's Globalized World:
Key Issues in Language Teaching**

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Key issues in language teaching. J.C. Richards. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. pp. xxii + 826

In his extensive book on the state of English language teaching around the world, Jack C. Richards begins with a discussion of the current role of English as an international language, and the resulting changes that have been wrought on English language teaching as a profession. As he explains:

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. (Richards, 2015, p. xx)

It is due to these changes that Richards wrote this update, recognizing the “need for a comprehensive text that explores key issues in English language teaching today” (ibid.). As an internationally recognized authority on English language teaching and teacher education, and author of numerous books and articles on English language teaching, Richards is in a unique position to compile such a text—one that provides a clear understanding of contemporary teaching theory and methodologies for teaching the English language.

Richards (2015) describes the genesis of this book as coming from “workshops and seminars as part of lecture tours” (p. v) he has been giving on English language teaching since the 1990s. This is a book written by a teacher’s teacher. Richards selected the topics based on his wide-ranging experience as an English language teacher and teacher educator, and on what he considers to be “practical classroom issues” (ibid., p. xxi). He goes beyond the practical, however, also providing both the “theory and research that can inform them” (ibid.). Although this would be useful as a textbook in many language teacher training courses, because it “does not assume a prior background in applied linguistics” (Richards, 2015, p. xxi), it is intended to be accessible to both student teachers as well as practicing language teachers, as is.

The book’s twenty-one chapters are divided into four parts. Part 1 “English language teaching today” introduces the book as well as some basic language teaching concepts such as second language acquisition theory, and current teaching approaches, including special-purpose approaches such as English for specific purposes (ESP), competency-based language teaching (CBLT), content-based instruction (CBI, CLIL), text-based instruction (TBI), and task-based language teaching (TBLT). In Part 2 “Facilitating student

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learning,” Richards covers issues related to language learners such as influences on learning, lesson structure, and classroom management. For Part 3 “Language and the four skills,” the author discusses English systems and skills, as well as discourse and pragmatics. Finally, Part 4 “The teacher’s environment” focuses on curriculum planning and course design, and teacher resources including textbooks, technology, and testing and assessment. This part closes with a discussion of professional development and continuing teacher education with the aim of providing teachers “with a foundation of essential knowledge and skills to support their teaching and ongoing career development” (Richards, 2015, p. xxii). The book is available in both a paperback and e-version format, which also includes video interviews of teachers and educators as well as videos by the author summarizing the chapters and major sections of the book.

The book is designed to be read in any order, and includes helpful cross-referencing between chapters, so that the reader may focus on particular concepts within different sections. The beginning of each of the four major parts of the book provides an overview of the material to be covered in that section, making it easy for the reader to pick and choose from among different topics, and then easily move around the book based on need and interest. Embedded throughout the book are questions which are designed to help the reader apply the information discussed in the book to his or her particular teaching context. In addition, at the close of each chapter, Richards includes discussion questions as well as suggestions for further reading regarding the topics covered in that chapter.

One of the most interesting aspects Richards has undertaken in this book is to consider “insights from classroom practitioners and teacher educators on issues raised” in each of the four parts of the book by including their “comments or ‘vignettes’ drawing on their own teaching experiences” (Richards, 2015, p. v). The perspectives offered from these teacher observations provide what Richards (2002) previously termed “‘insider’ accounts of teaching” (p. ix). Teaching English as a foreign language in the Mexico context is specifically included as part of Richard’s effort to incorporate such insider’ insights in his book. Contributions from English language teachers in Guanajuato, Morelia, Tuxtla Gutierrez, Puebla, and Izucar de Matamores may be of particular interest to MEXTESOL readers. While some of the issues raised by these teachers, such as “falling into the job” (Richards, 2015, p. 696; Lengeling, 2010), are perhaps specific to Mexico, others are important in any teaching context, and include topics such as learner-centered teaching (Richards, 2015, pp. 120-121); lesson planning (*ibid.*, p. 177); the use of technology and learner autonomy (*ibid.*, p. 640); and the use of portfolios for professional growth (*ibid.*, p. 720). In addition to these teacher-training issues, Richards includes a discussion of the types of pronunciation and accent preferred in different contexts, including Mexico (*ibid.*, p. 354). Richards also provides case studies comparing the experiences English teachers in Mexico, Cambodia, and Colombia when they themselves were learning English as a second language. For these case studies, Richards focuses on learner autonomy, motivation, and affective factors (*ibid.*, pp. 159-165).

With this comprehensive textbook, Richards has provided a valuable update on the global status of English language teaching. Even though he acknowledges that compiling such a book involves a lengthy process and extensive research, Richards recognizes that “a book like this is never really finished. There is always one more idea to add to the text, one more book or article to read or one more person to talk to” (Richards, 2010, p. vi). By

including input from other classroom practitioners and teacher educators, Richards embraces current theory “that characterizes teachers as legitimate knowers, as producers of legitimate knowledge, and as capable of constructing and sustaining their own professional development” (Johnson & Golombek, 2002, p. 3). Richards (2015) further acknowledges the importance of other and future voices in the development of this profession when he writes, referring to a comment by another researcher, “I have worked on it; you have worked on it; now let the readers work on it... And so now, it’s over to you!” (p. vi).

References

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