

Book Reviews

Teaching in Action: Case Studies from Second Language Classrooms.

Jack C. Richards, Editor. (1998). Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. 411 pp.

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Describing common work-related problems encountered by language teachers and the critical thinking and decision making skills involved in their solution constitute the main message of *Teaching in Action: Case Studies from Second Language Classrooms* edited by Jack C. Richards. The book offers the unique point of view from those who participated in the actual problem and solution process. While the overt purpose of the book is to provide language teachers with examples of possible solutions to situations that are common, the covert message is for teachers to develop further their critical thinking and decision making skills, and to consider participating in action research projects to contribute to the field of teacher education.

The book is a collection of 76 short case studies written by language teachers, including a description of the context, the problem, and the solution they utilized. Following each case study are teacher educator commentaries on the type of problem and the teacher's response. The case studies are divided into 11 different areas, consisting of teacher development, teaching in mainstream programs, introducing curriculum innovations, relations with colleagues and students, affective factors in the classroom, achieving appropriate learner behaviors, teaching writing, teaching classes with mixed levels or abilities, teaching speaking, teaching vocabulary and grammar, and teaching reading. Each section is clearly outlined with the title of the case study as well as the name(s) of the author(s) and the teacher educator who offers comments. The titles are clear in their description of the case study (e.g., Intercultural Faculty Meetings), so they offer a clear way of finding a specific topic.

The content of the book offers a way array of contexts and solutions, helpful to both the pre- and in-service teacher. It gives the pre-service teacher a global viewpoint

on issues related to teaching languages, as well as a clear understanding of how one may address specific problems that may arise. The comments by the teacher educator can serve as a means of reflecting further on the process of problem and solution. The book offers the in-service teacher the opportunity to expand beyond theory and his/her own teaching experience to see the responses of others in specific situations.

The book is an excellent opportunity for teacher development on an individual realm. One can choose to read the entire book or specific sections related to one's own context. It provides opportunities to examine what resolutions to problems seem to work in certain contexts; one might further this information by adapting it to his/her own situation.

If one considers using the book in a classroom situation, it would be best to utilize it as supplementary material, as there is a lack of focus necessary for a primary textbook. It is an excellent source for going beyond the typical theory-based classroom and illustrating actual experiences. Richards offers the following example of uses in teaching a specific issue (p. xiii):

- Preview the issue and introduce the problem
- Ask students to generate ideas and suggestions
- Read one or more case studies that deal with how teachers dealt with the issue
- Discuss the teacher's solution to the problem
- Read and react to the commentary on the case study
- Ask the students to suggest other possibilities

As Richards claims, the focus on what has been recently described as *teacher research* tries to address the issue of *outside observer versus teacher as researcher* by utilizing "teachers' accounts of teaching as a way of exploring teachers' beliefs, values, perceptions and thought processes and of understanding how these help shape teachers' practices" (p. xi). *Teaching in Action: Case Studies from Second Language Classrooms* is a valuable source that fulfills its objective of contributing a collection of various first-hand accounts useful for the individual teacher and the teacher education classroom.