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Reviewed work:

Teaching ESL/EFL Reading and Writing. (2009).
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Teaching ESL/EFL Reading and Writing by Paul Nation is written for in-service and future teachers who want to learn more about encouraging their students' development of reading and writing skills in classrooms of English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL). It has been conceived and used as a textbook for undergraduate and graduate courses of teaching methods. It offers practical suggestions for the classroom. It is also helpful in the development of new, or the improvement of existing, reading and writing programs. In conjunction with its companion book, *Teaching ESL/EFL Listening and Speaking* (Nation & Newton, 2008), the book could be used for a comprehensive course of ESL or EFL teaching methods, although *Teaching ESL/EFL Reading and Writing* can also be used on its own.

The book is divided into 10 chapters. Six of these address ESL or EFL reading, and three address ESL or EFL writing. The penultimate chapter discusses topic types in relation to both reading and writing.¹ In all 10 chapters, the focus is on the practice of teaching reading and writing by suggesting various types of activities teachers can use in or adapt for their own classrooms. All

these activities are designed to belong to one of four strands around which, according to Nation, a well-balanced language program should be organized. These strands are meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development. The importance of achieving equilibrium among these four strands in any language course is stressed throughout the book, and all activities are placed within a framework of these strands. They are introduced in chapter 1, but for a future or inexperienced teacher who only has access to this book, these definitions and explanations may be too brief. If so, the reader is referred to the companion book *Teaching ESL/EFL Listening and Speaking* for more details. This may not be a problem if both books are used together in a course or program. It may be an issue, however, if *Teaching ESL/EFL Reading and Writing* is to be used as a stand-alone textbook.

To complement the above-mentioned focus on teaching practice, the author briefly introduces the theory, background, or research relevant to the aspects of reading and writing targeted in the activities in each chapter. If readers are looking for a substantial or longer introduction to theories of reading and writing or for an overview of recent research in the field, they may be disappointed. On the other hand, if readers are searching for concrete suggestions of what to do in the classroom, this is the right book. Let me now turn to a more detailed discussion of the book's six chapters on second language (L2) reading, three chapters on L2 writing, and one chapter on topic types.

In chapters 1, 2, and 5, Nation addresses the mechanics of reading. Chapter 1 focuses on the general differences between learning to read in a first language (L1) and an L2. Nation presents activities in which L1 and L2 reading teachers typically engage their students to promote development of reading skills. In chapter 2, he discusses spelling and word recognition. This chapter is particularly useful and interesting for those (future) ESL or EFL teachers who work with students whose L1 does not use a Latin-based or even alphabetic writing system because Nation puts forward specific activities to encourage word-recognition and spelling-skill development in these students. In chapter 5, he explains the importance of reading speed and fluency development. Although teachers may not want to promote speed at the expense of comprehension, Nation recommends the use of his suggested activities to increase reading speed so that learners make "best use of what they have already learned" (p. 63).

Chapters 3 and 4 deal with intensive and extensive reading. For novice ESL or EFL reading teachers, the most interesting feature of the chapter on intensive reading is the section that discusses the form and focus of different types of reading comprehension questions, and in doing so it summarizes as well as complements Day and Park's (2005) article previously published in *Reading in a Foreign Language*. L1 reading practices such as reciprocal teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1986) and concept-oriented reading instruction (Guthrie, 2003) are also briefly introduced, and their application in the L2 classroom is discussed. As one would expect, vocabulary and grammar also receive some attention in this section. The activities are designed to work with vocabulary and grammar in the context of the reading text. However, the grammar exercises require learners to know and use a range of metalinguistic terms, which may be challenging for young learners or those who have not received traditional grammar instruction. The extensive reading chapter provides an informative overview of how teachers should initiate and structure an extensive reading program. Although the chapter offers all the support teachers need to commence such a program, it may also discourage them from attempting to do so, as

Nation (2009) emphasizes that “learners should read at least 15–20 and preferably 30 readers in a year” (p. 56) to reap the benefits from an extensive reading program. This simply may not be feasible in contexts without sufficient time and money.

In chapter 6, Nation deals with reading assessment. He introduces key terms such as reliability and validity and discusses different strategies for classroom-based assessment of reading skills. A very interesting section of the chapter discusses diagnosing ESL or EFL reading problems ranging from simple vision problems to difficulties in word recognition and limitations in vocabulary and grammar knowledge. Nation also touches upon how to assess reading proficiency and how the cloze and multiple choice and short answer questions might be used to do this. Although this information is very helpful for ESL or EFL reading teachers, the biggest challenge for novice teachers is not mentioned: How does one choose an appropriate text for reading assessment? Issues such as level of vocabulary, topic and content complexity, nonlinguistic elements of the text (e.g., graphs and images), and text readability in general are important considerations in this regard. Unfortunately, they receive no attention in this chapter.

Three chapters deal specifically with writing. Chapter 7 focuses on helping learners write. The suggested tasks include paired or group writing and guided writing. The pair and group tasks, such as the dictogloss (Wajnryb, 1988, 1989) or group compositions, are very flexible and adaptable,² but the guided tasks do not offer similar flexibility. In the guided tasks, the use of metalinguistic concepts is very prevalent, and grammar rules are presented in a traditional way that may not fit into communication and meaning-focused curricula. In terms of grammar instruction, Larsen-Freedman (2003) argues that “being able to use grammar structures does not only mean using the forms accurately; it means using them meaningfully (semantics) and appropriately (pragmatics) as well” (p. 36). Nation’s guided writing tasks, however, focus only on the form of grammatical features. Novice teachers would probably benefit from assistance in establishing the link between teaching grammatical forms, their meaning (semantics), and their use (pragmatics) in the classroom. In chapter 8, Nation suggests activities to help students move through each step of the writing process. Two examples are using question words to generate ideas and peer feedback to review the text. Chapter 10 deals with how teachers can respond to their students’ writing and use this process as writing assessment. Nation provides suggestions of different forms and formats that teachers can use to target their feedback to individuals, groups, or the whole class, including conferences with individual students or a written report given to everyone in the class.

Chapter 9 establishes the link between reading and writing. Rather than adopting a genre approach to text, as seen in some of the L2 literacy literature (e.g., Hyland, 2007), Nation focuses on topic types, which allows him to analyze the functions of texts (e.g., instructions, process, and characteristics) instead of the text genres (e.g., newspaper reports, troubleshooting notes, and e-mails). The advantage of topic types for ESL or EFL teachers is that they allow teachers to concentrate on text functions and the language needed to compose or comprehend texts and not on text characteristics related to specific formats. The disadvantage is, as Nation acknowledges, that most authentic texts use more than one topic type.

Overall, Nation provides a brief overview of the most important issues pertaining to ESL or EFL reading and writing instruction. Novice teachers will find suggestions of activities that they can

use in their classrooms and a framework to evaluate and plan classroom activities. At the same time, the book helps teachers to devise a well-balanced approach to ESL or EFL reading and writing instruction. The suggested activities are situated within a theoretical framework and understanding of how reading and writing develop, but the framework is often not shared explicitly with the reader. This is also one of the main criticisms of the book. A novice teacher (the target audience of this book) would have benefited from a “further reading” section or even a short annotated bibliography at the end of each chapter. These additions could guide the independent reader to more detailed coverage of the issues. If the book is used in a course of teaching methodology, the instructor can of course easily do this for her or his students. All in all, Nation provides a brief but comprehensive introduction to teaching ESL or EFL reading and writing.

Notes

1. Some L2 writing researchers consider topic types a synonym of genre. According to Biber (1989, cited in Paltridge, 2002), however, the two have distinct characteristics. Genre refers to the social context within which a text is created (writer, audience, context, and purpose), whereas topic types “represent rhetorical modes such as ‘problem–solution,’ ‘exposition,’ or ‘argument’ type texts that are similar in terms of internal discourse patterns, irrespective of genre” (Paltridge, p. 74).
2. For a dictogloss, students take notes while they listen to a text and then in pairs try to recreate the text they heard based on the notes they took (see Wajnryb, 1988, for detailed procedures).

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