

Davies, P., & Pearse, E. (2008). *Success in English teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 221pp.

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Given such a title, most aspiring or seasoned English-language teaching professionals and teacher trainers would instantaneously be drawn to the promise of “success,” as I was. When I received the book, I was anticipating an expanded or updated edition of *Success in English Teaching*, but, surprisingly, even with all the development and insights that research in the field of second-language teaching and learning has generated since the title’s first publication in 2000, the book remains as it was when it was first published; only the book cover has changed.

According to its back-cover synopsis, *Success in English Teaching* provides “a comprehensive and readable introduction to teaching English. . . . [I]t is easy to follow and suitable for initial teacher training, but also provides guidance and fresh ideas for more experienced teachers.” The introductory chapter, however, provides a more accurate description of the book’s intended users – “non-native speakers of English” who “have little or no formal training as English teachers” and “are teaching in the students’ own country” (p. xiii). The book contains 12 brief, easy-to-follow chapters. As succinctly stated on its cover and in the introduction, the first seven chapters offer “essential theoretical principles, and present a wide and coherent range of practical teaching ideas” (back cover and p. xiii). The last five chapters, which deal with issues beyond classroom instruction, cover such topics as “planning and management, materials and aids, evaluation and testing, and professional development” (back cover and p. xiii).

A few thoughts and concerns arose as I read through the book. First, in Chapter 1, Davies and Pearse state that “real success in teaching and learning should be whether or not the learners can communicate at all in English” (p. 1), and that “[i]t [i.e., real success] is the ability of learners to use English effectively in real communication situations” (p. 2). Then they assert: “Your success as a teacher is based entirely on their success as learners” (p. 2). To me, such terms as “success” or “effectiveness” are problematic because they are relative to individual situations, tasks, and contexts and seem to neglect the process of learning, instead focusing solely on its product. Also, contrary to recent research findings on the importance of learner variables and learner agency, the authors seem to place responsibility for students’ learning solely on the teacher.

Second, the authors stated that the book “focuse[s] especially on teaching at secondary-school level and above” (p. xiii). Readers with little or no background or training in English-language teaching would have benefited from practical teaching examples or activities at their respective appropriate levels throughout the text. Potential readers could also benefit from an indication on the back cover that the book is “especially” for non-native English-speaking instructors teaching “in the students’ own country” (p. xiii).

Third, although the book includes a glossary of nearly six pages, most of the so-called “theoretical principles” in the first seven chapters are more common sense than empirically substantiated knowledge. As such, if the book is to be used as a basis for courses or seminars, teacher trainers would need to supplement it with material or examples that are more substantial than those offered in the book. In addition, both aspiring language teachers and teacher trainers would benefit from a presentation approach similar to the one used in the testing and assessment chapter, with a clear elucidation of the basic key terms, concepts, theories, and/or principles.

Fourth, although I agree with the authors about the importance of taking an integrated approach to language teaching and appreciate their well-meaning intention to cover a broad range of topics, the complexity of the topic areas chosen by the authors, such as the teaching and learning of vocabulary, spoken communication skills, and written communication skills cannot be adequately addressed in 10 to 17 pages of coverage. This is problematic when, for example, the authors try to deal with the development of listening and reading skills in the chapters that address spoken and written communication skills, respectively. There is also no separate chapter on grammar, nor are grammar teaching and learning systematically incorporated into the first seven chapters. The emphasis on spoken and written skills rather than on listening and reading skills not

only understates the important roles of these latter skills in language-learning, but it also neglects an opportunity to integrate recent research-based pedagogical advancements made in second language listening, reading, and grammar (see Byram, 2004; Hinkel, 2005).

Fifth, considering that the book was written for instructors “teaching in the students’ own country, not an English-speaking country,” (p. xiii), it is surprising that there is no mention of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) or resources and tools readily available over the internet (Huang, 2008). Such resources and tools would provide students with experiences that they would have been afforded had their teaching and learning taken place in English-speaking countries. In addition, the text incorporated neither the cultural dimension of language teaching and learning nor the critical role of intercultural competence in developing communicative competence. Nor did the book consider the varied contexts and needs of those teaching English as an international language to be used among English-as-an-additional language speakers. Without thoughtful consideration of those components and without an updated sources and further reading section that does “offer up-to-date views of teaching English” (p. 211), a book designed “to provide a source of reference for both language teachers and teacher trainers” (back cover) cannot be complete. The current further-reading section lacks anything published in the past ten years.

Beyond these concerns, the book’s strengths lie in its suitability for readers who are new to the profession, have little or no background in English-language teaching, or are at the very beginning stage of a teacher-training program. *Success in English Teaching* provides a quick and easy entry into the teaching of English as a foreign language. The book is accessible to non-specialists and clearly organized, and it provides a simplified historical account of the development of English language teaching approaches and methods; basic, common-sense language-teaching principles, as well as practical teaching ideas that serve as a good starting point for users who are seeking to build their understanding and repertoires of English-language teaching strategies.

References

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