

# Reviews

## *Reflective Language Teaching: From Research to Practice.*

Thomas S. C. Farrell. London: Continuum, 2007. viii + 202 pp.

*Reviewed by*

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Reflection, as a broad concept, is an idea that has been gaining currency in the language teaching world since the 1980s. Most teachers recognize that their professional development is enhanced by looking critically at what they do, and why they do it. This practice has been taken up by teacher educators, and some form of reflection has become a common component of pre-service training. Whether there is a direct link between reflective teaching and student learning is yet to be determined. However, the long-term motivation of career teachers does seem to be enhanced by enthusiastic and positive self-analysis. Farrell points out in the introduction that teacher burnout was a catalyst for the development of reflective practice; it is interesting to consider the parallels between the birth of learner autonomy in the 1960s sociopolitical milieu and the emergence of reflective practice for teachers. As research also suggests that the best learners are those who can reflect on how they learn and what they are learning (Rubin, 1975; Oxford, 1990), it can only be beneficial for teachers to practice what they preach.

Farrell attempts to bring together research and practice in this functional book for teachers who would like to explore their own professional development. The author is well placed to write this particular book, having published extensively on the topic over the last 10 years; indeed, his bibliography includes more than 25 papers that he himself has authored or co-authored. Much of this research is summarized and gathered here, and his passion for the topic comes across clearly.

There are 14 chapters, the first an introduction to reflective language teaching and the last neatly tying together the threads in the preceding chapters. Chapters 2 through 13 are divided into two parts: six chapters discussing themes for reflection, and the next six focusing on methods of reflection. This works very well as an organizational structure, and although it would be possible to dip in and read chapter by chapter, it may be more

effective to read from start to finish. Each of the chapters follows a similar pattern, moving from a brief context-setting literature review to one or two case studies (often carried out by the author himself), to a reflection on the case studies. In keeping with the subtitle of the book, the key section of each chapter is "From Research to Practice," in which Farrell enlarges on the literature and links it to both the case studies and practical methods to put this knowledge into action. In fact, there is more of an interplay between theory and practice in this book than the subtitle suggests, not only from research to practice, but from practice to research. The reflection questions at the end of each chapter help maintain the momentum by reminding readers that they are supposed to actively engage with what they are reading.

The chapter on action research (chapter 8) is a good example of what this book provides: a concise guide to both the rationale and processes of personal classroom research projects for practicing teachers. Another highlight is the fifth chapter, written with Jack Richards, which focuses on the teachers' language proficiency. This is not a topic commonly addressed in this type of book, an omission which not only sidelines nonnative English teachers, but also assumes native speakers have no need to attend to their language skills. As Farrell and Richards point out, limited language proficiency restricts a teacher's classroom flexibility and the ability to provide accurate models for learners.

For those interested in investigating reflective practice further, there is an extensive bibliography, although its depth is perhaps greater than its breadth. Applied linguistics is a maturing field. We should be proud that our field has reached a level of confidence and accumulated a body of research from which we can all draw; however, it is cross pollination which keeps us healthy. Previous generations of language teaching professionals were forced to look outside the then nascent field of study and adapt what they found for their own purposes. Ironically, this limitation may have encouraged more creative thinking. Reflective practice is being vigorously pursued in mainstream education, social work, and healthcare; there is even a refereed journal entitled *Reflective Practice*. It would have been useful if some of this research had worked its way into Farrell's book to give a broader perspective. Doctors and social workers come from different contexts, but can provide us with meaningful insights because contrasting perspectives are vital in keeping reflection fresh and relevant.

One of the greatest difficulties in effective critical reflection is asking the right questions. Another is finding valid answers, that is, finding out what we really believe rather than what we *think* we believe. Breaking this stalemate is one of the most challenging aspects of reflection. As Farrell puts it, "what

teachers say they do (their espoused theories) and what they actually do (their theories in action) are not always the same" (p. 29). Outside the English language teaching field, some have made greater use of metaphor and creative writing (Bolton, 2005), or mentoring to find core beliefs to change behaviors (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). In fairness, the author is mindful of this problem throughout the book, and there is an emphasis on collaboration in chapter 10 on teacher development groups and in chapter 12 on critical friendships, but a broader perspective would have helped separate this book from others that language teachers interested in reflection may already be familiar with.

Despite this criticism, *Reflective Language Practice* is a very user-friendly, "state-of-the-art" text for any teacher considering embarking on self-initiated professional development, either alone or in collaboration with peers. In updating and organizing current thinking, the author has produced an excellent primer for less-experienced teachers. If teachers with experience in reflection are looking for reinvigoration, they, too, may find it here, and as such it is an excellent addition to the field.

## References

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***Teaching Academic Writing.* Patricia Friedrich (Ed.). London: Continuum, 2008. xiv + 246 pp.**

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The teaching of writing in the academic context has greatly evolved, and there are many aspects to defining what academic writing is as well as how it may progress in the future. *Teaching Academic Writing*, edited by Patricia Friedrich, is a well-written collection of articles by authors with a keen interest in the field.

The first chapter, by Knoblauch and Matsuda, begins with an overview of teaching 1st year composition in 20th century U.S. higher education. The authors discuss various arguments as to how the rudimentary features of teaching composition began in the U.S. by examining the history of rhetoric during ancient Greek civilization. Over the past 40 years, rhetoricians have come to an understanding that the process approach is more beneficial in the teaching of writing. Questions, however, have arisen concerning the future of teaching academic writing and its value to the student. The authors conclude their article by encouraging academics in the field of writing to continue to explore methods of teaching composition so that it benefits both the student and the instructor.

In the second chapter, Etherington focuses the teaching of academic writing on students who major in different subjects. Although the author discusses research which concludes that teaching basic academic writing skills to all nonnative English students is beneficial, especially during 1st year composition, he adds that as writing teachers, we may not be familiar with the intricacies of each student's discipline. The majority of Etherington's article supports the view that it is necessary for academics to teach students according to disciplines because many variations in writing are not transferable across subject areas. The author emphasizes that even lower level nonnative English writers benefit more from discipline-specific training in writing. By pointing out that writing teachers must discover the types of rhetorical styles students will be using through working with discipline specialists, Etherington makes a strong argument that writers can become more effective in producing work in their own disciplines.

Chapter 3 presents informative ways of orienting teachers to the tasks involved in teaching composition. Anoyokye describes how writing is a con-

tinuous process and should involve both oral and written discourse. Since brainstorming and discussion about a topic are as valuable as the written product, it is necessary for dialogue to take place before a student even begins to compose. Writing teachers must be involved in this process, continually assessing their knowledge about writing and passing their ideas on to students. In this way, both teachers and students will continually improve their skills.

Tardy and Courtney discuss a variety of ways teachers can create interesting activities for students. They focus on research-based writing across disciplines for 1st-year composition students. Many writing teachers engage their students in humanities-oriented writing. These authors agree with Etherington who maintains earlier in the book that more attention needs to be given to discipline specific writing in order to train students more efficiently in their subject areas. As educators, they emphasize that we have a special responsibility to mold students into writers who can become comfortable with their academic endeavors.

In chapter 5, Ferris stresses the importance of feedback on student writing. Although giving students feedback is time consuming, and in some cases ineffective, it is a potentially beneficial way of creating a dialog between the writer and the reader. From the students' side, it is important for them to understand the comments that teachers make, and they also need to understand the types of rewriting that are important in revising a paper. Ferris reminds educators that both new and experienced teachers need to review their reasons for and methods of giving student feedback.

In the next chapter, Morley discusses writing programs developed in the U.K. Classes are constructed for international students according to discipline; however, much of the material used is not specifically focused on content areas. Due to the vast numbers of students studying in areas such as medical and human sciences, the content topic of health may be used, but in general terms. Emphasis is placed on format and language which may then be applied to a specific discipline depending upon a student's concentration.

In chapter 7, Casey and Selfe advocate the use of technology in writing instruction, especially the use of computers and networking. For many composition teachers, the transition from pen and paper to technology presents a variety of challenges, especially since the latter is continually changing. The authors argue that teachers must avail themselves of updated methods without ignoring the basics of research writing. They mention that no matter which method an instructor chooses, emphasis must be on the education of the student to communicate efficiently and effectively.

Friedrich presents a qualitative study examining the reactions of monolingual English speakers when looking at writing in a second language. Her primary intention is to make these individuals appreciate the difficulties second language writers have when they bring their own experiences and cultures into their writing. Her findings will be of interest to both native language and EFL/ESL teachers of writing.

In chapter 9, Stancliff considers the value of community-based writing and its relationship to academic composition. By having students choose personal issues, conduct primary and secondary research, then complete a project related to the topic, the author argues that more meaningful work is produced. Students are encouraged to publish, present, and create websites about their topics as a culmination of the process.

In the final chapter, Pecorari discusses the many issues surrounding the problem of plagiarism. Citing several case studies, Pecorari emphasizes the need to teach better writing skills, including how to avoid plagiarism. Although some students deliberately copy sources, others believe that they are correctly using paraphrasing, summarizing, and citation skills. Usually, however, punishment, not education, takes the forefront when students are accused of copying.

*Teaching Academic Writing* is an excellent text for novice as well as experienced writing teachers. Friedrich has compiled a variety of well-written articles, some of which include the common thread of teaching across disciplines and each with a different focus on academic writing. Several chapters include valuable reference/website lists and evaluation forms. Each writer clearly expresses chapter themes through discourse and by providing comprehensive examples. As someone who has taught academic writing for many years, I found many innovative ideas worth trying in the classroom. I highly recommend this book to any educator who teaches writing, whether their students are nonnative or native speakers of the language.

***Technologies in the Second Language Classroom.* Joel Bloch. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2008. viii + 255 pp.**

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This addition to the Michigan Series on Teaching Multilingual Writers addresses a topic that many composition teachers face with both anticipation and apprehension: technology. A telling sentence appears on the first page of the introduction: "Today, there is still little evidence that technology creates better writers" (p. 1). Why, then, a book about technology in the second language composition classroom? The answer is that regardless of its pedagogical ramifications, technology is inescapable for L2 teachers and learners. However, staying abreast of information technology is an aspect of professional development that some instructors put off, not only because the scope of IT is daunting, but also because mastery gained at substantial expenditure in time and energy can quickly become obsolete.

Well acquainted with this challenge, Joel Bloch offers a book filled with ideas to help L2 composition teachers assemble their own framework for interpreting and applying technology. Bloch is the appropriate author for a practitioner audience: A long-time composition teacher, he clearly gained his insight through careful research of technical sources and firsthand experience incorporating technology into the classroom. He considers himself a "technorealist," neither extolling nor decrying the presence of computer technology in the L2 composition classroom. Writing with a tone of guarded optimism, he examines both the challenges and promises of technology from theoretical and practical perspectives. In six chapters, he covers substantial ground, including the history of technology in the composition classroom, the arguments for and against different uses of technology, and personal accounts of his classroom experiences. Bloch does not attempt to prescribe a particular approach, and his survey of the field reveals why: Divided opinion, conflicting evidence, and rapid technological evolution mean that unqualified advice is meaningless.

In many respects, the book serves as a good starting point for the L2 instructor new to the application of technology to the writing classroom. The author assumes that the reader has a firm grasp of writing pedagogy, but only a minimal technical background (i.e., experience with email, word

processing, and search engines). Potentially unfamiliar terms such as *blog*, *RSS*, and *podcast* are usually followed by a brief explanation.

Nevertheless, *Technologies* does not aim to demystify technology for the novice. The book is not an instruction manual, and rightly so: recipes and tips would diminish in value soon after publication because innovation would soon make the technology in question outdated. Individual instances of technology are treated with broad description, a sensible decision for a volume of this length for a field so vast. Details and anecdotes serve to illustrate how technology has been used, not how the reader should use it. Consequently, the book may offer less to an instructor with substantial experience with CALL, online learning, blogging, and similar technologies.

Chapter 1, "Issues in Using Technology in the L2 Composition Classroom," presents a range of perspectives on composition and technology. It examines the nature of literacy, language learning, and authorship in a digital world. While interesting, the chapter sprawls and poses more questions than it answers, which could be off-putting for the reader who may already be overwhelmed by the complexity of technology. Later chapters reveal that an instructor does not need to come to grips with all of these considerations when setting out to use technology in the classroom.

Chapter 2, "The Potential of New Technologies," delineates much more clearly the links between theory and implementation. It covers the history of several well-known forms of technology, including word processors, email, hypertext, and blogs. Bloch describes how writing and its pedagogy have shifted from paper to screen, from an individual effort to a social and collaborative one, and from a teacher-centered process to a learner-directed one. These changes have altered the nature of text and audience. Composition teachers must inform student writers of the changing expectations that readers have.

Bloch hits his stride in chapters 3, 4, and 5, where he turns to practical matters and makes it evident that his strengths and background lie more in application than theory. These middle chapters provide concise descriptions of how not only instructors can use technology, but also how students can use it to improve composition on their own. Although this section of the book has the greatest risk of becoming outdated, it provides the clearest guidance.

Chapter 3, "Integrating the Computer and the Internet," describes the ramifications of the Web for composition pedagogy. Web technology has expanded authorial considerations to include elements such as page layout and intertextual links. To Bloch, students must come to understand the

nature of visual presentation in order to be authors in an Internet world: The impression conveyed through the design of a site can determine the reader's perception of the writer's authority. Bloch includes a description of his experience instructing students how to produce webpages, and makes the analysis lucid by interspersing it with student commentary on their own work. The chapter offers a host of practical information, including a list of links to sites that explain plagiarism and a set of guidelines for evaluating webpages.

Chapter 4, "Computer-Mediated Discourse in the L2 Composition Classroom," contains a discussion of the profound impact that CMD (computer-mediated discourse) has had on interaction, writing, and audience. Bloch compares the advantages and drawbacks of synchronous and asynchronous forms of this technology, examples of which would be chatrooms and email, respectively. CMD helps nonnative speakers circumvent difficulties that arise during face-to-face interaction. For example, blogging, a form of asynchronous CMD, eliminates the barrier of poor fluency. To support his conclusions, Bloch provides numerous examples of interaction drawn from the CMD classroom.

Chapter 5, "Corpus Linguistics in the L2 Classroom," describes the use of concordance software and its effect on the roles of student and teacher and on the place of traditional grammar. Such tools allow learners more discretion over their learning process. Instead of relying on the teacher or on the limited explanations and examples in textbooks, students can explore the variation and complexity of authentic language and arrive at their own conclusions about correct usage. Like Chapters 3 and 4, this chapter outlines the benefits and drawbacks of the technology and points the reader in the right direction for exploring this technology. Bloch concludes the chapter with a discussion of producing a corpus and redesigning a piece of concordance software for his own classroom.

The last chapter, "A Final Word," meanders through previously covered ground and adds very little of substance. A preferable conclusion would have synthesized the book's prominent themes and cast the author's ideas in a new light.

On a general note, one recurrent issue that warranted fuller treatment is intellectual property, since the Internet offers access to substantial quantities of copyrighted data. At what point do students and teachers cross the threshold of legally permissible use? It is understandable, though frustrating, that the book does not provide clear answers since the law has lagged behind developments in information technology. However, it would have been useful to indicate more clearly what is protected by law and what is not.

A further quibble is that the book should have been more carefully checked for misspellings and missing words, peccadilloes frequent enough to leave an impression on the reader. A book on technology should not contain text errors that software normally identifies. The fault for such oversight lies with those responsible for the book in its final form.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, *Technologies* is a worthwhile read. Writing instructors wanting to improve their use of technology will find a range of useful insights and practical ideas for the classroom.

***Teaching English Language Learners through Technology.* Tony Erben, Ruth Ban, & Martha Castañeda. New York & London: Routledge, 2009. xiv + 220 pp.**

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Since the widespread emergence of second-generation Internet applications (Web 2.0) such as wikis, blogs, video- and photosharing, podcasting, and virtual worlds, a number of introductory guides for language learners and teachers have begun to appear. While research on the use of these technologies and web-based applications continues to be rather sparse, many of the introductory books continue to describe the transformative potential of the new technologies and the enhanced motivational affect on the learners with an almost crusading zeal. *Teaching English Language Learners through Technology* can be viewed as another book in this line, though it has a much narrower focus on integrating technology in the U.S. school system and offers little beyond what is already on the market.

The book is primarily targeted at pre- and in-service teachers in the U.S. who find themselves teaching content-based subjects and have to balance the needs and abilities of a diverse range of native speakers and English language learners (ELLs). The book belongs to a new series addressing the challenges posed by a mainstreaming policy entitled "Teaching English Language Learners Across the Curriculum." The series includes three other titles authored by a combination of language and content area specialists and focuses on the relationship between ELLs and mathematics, career and

technical education, and social studies. Though mainstreaming is currently not a policy of much significance in the Japanese educational context, the book is valuable as a condensed and practical guide to some of the newer learning technologies with its teacher-friendly list of CALL related resources and a potentially helpful glossary of key terms.

Part 1, "Your English Language Learner," contains eight sections addressing the individual and cultural differences of ELLs and their distinctive learning processes. The eight sections include an introduction to key challenges presented by ELLs and describe in detail the process of English language learning with a focus on the importance of cultural adjustment. The section on strategies for establishing home-school communication with students and parents is particularly apposite in this context, as is the consideration given to how to deal effectively with English language learners with special needs. While each of the sections is brief, the cumulative effect produces an interesting overview, and these short texts could be used for professional development discussions on the theme of cultural difference and learner adjustment among newer teachers.

Part 2, "What We Know from Research," contains five succinct sections on current trends in language teaching methodology and computer assisted language learning (CALL). The sections include an overview of Vygotsky's thought and the sociocultural theory of second language acquisition, leading naturally into a discussion of constructivism and problem-based learning. Three shorter chapters contextualise these theoretical perspectives by positioning them within a wider history of CALL. The conversational style of the theoretical discussion will appeal to new teachers, but the underlying weakness of the book concerns the lack of a real rationale for using technology to integrate ELLs into the mainstream.

Part 3, "Teaching ELLs through Technology," consists of seven practical sections introducing a wide range of current technologies and applying them across the four skills. The sections include concise overviews of e-creation tools, e-assessment (portfolios and quizzes), and how to manage teaching with the now seemingly compulsory school Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Though many teachers are familiar with the Blackboard Learning System, the book introduces two relatively new and innovative VLEs, *Nicenet* and *Ning*, and outlines a number of strategies for incorporating them into teaching activities, rather than merely using them to administer courses and act as a silo for storing documents. In contrast, both *Nicenet* and *Ning* can be customised by teachers to develop interactive learning environments with a number of social networking tools and thus foster collaborative learning spaces. Other sections in the final part of the book focus on applications

for communication classes (e.g., email, listservs, discussion boards, instant messaging, and Voice over Internet Protocol); those addressing writing and reading (e.g., writeboard, wikis, webquests); and those focusing on enhancing listening skills (e.g., vodcasts, audioblogs, and video sharing libraries). Following the more practical focus of the closing sections, Part 3 rather abruptly ends the book, and there is no formal conclusion to tie the three parts together or offer a restatement of the rationale for using learning technologies in the ELL context.

The lack of a formal conclusion reinforces the impression that a book on technology might have been thought to be a “popular” addition by the publisher of the series, but there is no research presented about why technologies enhance learning outcomes for ELLs or how such research might be conducted in the future. The book’s practical focus, frequent and helpful teaching tips, and personal approach underlined by its use of vignettes detailing teachers’ in-class experiences, could make it a useful primer for instructors new to the field; however, for those seeking a broader engagement with emerging technologies, both Sharma and Barrett’s *Blended Learning* (2007) and Dudeney and Hockly’s *How to Teach English with Technology* (2007) are more comprehensive and less narrowly focused.

## References

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**Teaching ESL/EFL Listening and Speaking.** I. S. P. Nation and Jonathan Newton. New York and London: Routledge, 2009.

xiii + 205pp.

**Teaching ESL/EFL Reading and Writing.** I. S. P. Nation. New York and London: Routledge, 2009. xi + 171 pp.

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Have you ever thought of giving your students small doses of alcohol in order to improve their pronunciation? Apparently, a group of teachers tried this in the 1970s and found that it reduced learners' inhibitions, and thus improved their confidence in producing "the unusual sounds of a new language in the presence of their friends" (Listening and Speaking, 2009, p. 72). This is only one of the many possible language-teaching activities, supported by research evidence, mentioned in these two detailed and exhaustive manuals.

These companion texts from the Applied Linguistics Professional Series cater primarily for teachers in training. Teachers starting out in the profession will find them particularly useful, as they provide important basic strategies upon which to lay the foundations for teaching the four language skills. The practical suggestions focusing on long-term learner improvement will also be of interest to practicing teachers.

While the books can be used independently, they contain common principles, in particular the way that they are both organised around Nation's Four Strands: 1) meaning-focused input, 2) meaning-focused output, 3) language-focused learning, and 4) fluency development. The authors deal with each skill separately, although they stress the integrated nature of language learning throughout, and there is a certain amount of overlap and repetition. In fact, the books are best regarded as a single text: the first chapter of *Listening and Speaking (LS)*, which outlines the Four Strands, is intended to stand as the introduction to both books, though its title, "Parts and Goals of a Listening and Speaking Course," is somewhat misleading.

*LS* continues, in its second chapter, with ideas and principles for teaching both listening and speaking to beginners, followed by a chapter about listening in general, and one focusing on "Dictation and Related Activities." In chapter 5, Nation and Newton move on to speaking, starting with "Pro-

nunciation." They then discuss "Learning through Task-focused Interaction," before moving on to particular techniques for developing speaking ability: "Learning through Pushed Output." In keeping with the Four Strands theme, chapter 8 deals with "Language-focused Learning," as applied to speaking, and chapter 9 with "Developing Fluency." Finally, chapter 10 discusses monitoring and testing.

*Reading and Writing (RW)* has a similar format to *LS*. It begins with a chapter on early reading, followed by one on word recognition and spelling, chapter 3 deals with intensive reading and chapter 4 with extensive reading, chapter 5 with fluency and chapter 6 with assessment. Nation then moves on to writing, with three chapters on the development of writing skills, leading up to a final chapter on assessment, entitled "Responding to Written Work."

Both books present a wide range of tested activities at various levels (*LS* alone mentions 123 techniques). Theory and pedagogical issues are discussed in detail and the suggestions included are always supported by research findings. In view of the importance the authors attach to the Four Strands, it is useful to see how these are exemplified in the texts.

Learning through meaning-focused input (Strand 1) refers to listening and reading where the learner's attention is on the ideas and message conveyed by the language. Examples include, at the elementary level, listening to stories, oral cloze exercises, and "What is it?" activities, and, at a higher level, practice in note taking. Examples of reading exercises include sentence completion, prediction, and "What does what?" exercises.

Meaning-focused output (Strand 2) is speaking and writing, where the learner's attention is on conveying ideas and messages. For example, "pushed output" occurs when through encouragement or necessity learners have to produce spoken language in unfamiliar areas. Nation and Newton claim that pushed output can result in turning learners' receptive knowledge into productive use. When writing, learners should have clear goals, and a model of their intended readers. To develop writing skills, Nation favours a "process" approach, which helps the teacher monitor the different stages and difficulties encountered along the way. The focus then is not so much on the finished product as on the methods used, and being able to diagnose learners' strengths and weaknesses. He regards assessment, both summative and formative, as an important part of the writing process.

The authors stress the need for language-focused learning (Strand 3), including letter knowledge, spelling, formal word recognition, and deliberate vocabulary learning as well as grammar. In this context they are happy for students to use bilingual or electronic dictionaries and for teachers to use

techniques such as translation, glosses, and dictation. In *RW*, Nation advocates the use of guided composition and substitution exercises under the heading of Writing. These arguably border on grammar teaching. However, it is both impossible and undesirable to offer a course in only one skill, and communicative efforts often fail due to the absence of a solid grounding in the basics. Closely linked to this is feedback, which forms the backbone of what Nation considers to be a good writing programme. He argues that “feedback includes, but is broader than, correction,” suggesting that the final product in itself is not the only concern. To this end, he includes a pro-forma feedback sheet with several category headings for quick and easy comments.

“Learn a little, use a lot,” sums up the authors’ ideas on fluency (Strand 4). These may seem drastic – “If the items that have been learnt are not readily available for fluent use, then the learning has been for little purpose” – but many teachers are guilty of neglecting practice due to the pressure of a syllabus, and should be reminded that gains can easily disappear without consolidation. The chapter on extensive reading is characteristic. Although the graded reader genre bridges the gap between the necessity for meaning-focused input and fluency practice, Nation considers the learning to be largely “incidental,” and progress to be “fragile.” He acknowledges that vocabulary enrichment gained by extensive reading is lost without further reinforcement. He therefore supports artificial teacher intervention, such as post-reading discussion groups, to promote language progress. Nation sees no harm in students reading at levels below their ability, or re-reading favourites because this ensures fluency and thus consolidation, which is a key principle he stresses repeatedly during the book. Ideally, he suggests the learner should read many books at the same level to be fully exposed to the recurring vocabulary and grammatical constructions written into that level, before moving on. To benefit fully from extensive reading, the author believes that students must be offered a systematic course in speed reading, one which ensures comprehension is not sacrificed at the expense of speed.

A frequent theme in both texts is a strong recognition for learners’ emotional problems and the stresses they undergo. At one point, for instance, tongue-twisters are described as “a cruel and unusual punishment.” While one may not agree with this opinion, it reminds us that the first duty of teachers is to their students’ emotional well-being, and that the creation of a pleasant and encouraging atmosphere is more important than pedagogical theory. Research quoted provides evidence of what experienced teachers know: that too much detailed error-focused feedback can be negative and discourage learners from taking risks and writing much at all. Besides electronic feedback (e.g., MS Word’s ‘Track Changes’), additional forms of

feedback which Nation recommends include reading to others, publication, and wall display, partly because he believes in peer feedback and the sense of audience it gives. He also regards self-assessment very highly, as it “encourages meta-cognitive awareness.”

As the introductory paragraph in this review suggests, the two texts are certainly comprehensive. The reader has the impression that every single idea about every level of English teaching, going back to the 1960s, is contained within Nation and Newton’s pages. Nothing seems to have been omitted. It does not always make for easy reading, and the onus is on the reader to sift out the pure gold and take away new insights on language-teaching issues. Unfortunately neither of the indexes covers the contents fully, making it hard to retrieve information later. There is a “Techniques Index” in *LS*, but it is arranged by chapter.

Nation and Newton set out to offer teachers the means whereby they can plan and develop a course which includes “a balanced set of opportunities for learning, not a set of isolated activities.” This intention informs these books, and as such they will prove invaluable. If you are looking for a single revolutionary idea to transform your teaching, you will not find it in this course. Perhaps, however, the fact is that there is no short, visionary answer to “How to teach EFL,” but that the best option is a sensible, eclectic, middle-of-the-road approach, which draws on the experience and research of the past 50 years.