

BOOK REVIEW

Changing Methodologies in TESOL

Jane Spiro

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This book offers an overview of key concepts related to TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) and the methodological changes that this field has undergone in recent decades. The author states that the book “is aimed at the student, student teacher and practising teacher of TESOL interested in how the English language is experienced, taught and learnt in the twenty-first century worldwide” (p.1). This wide angle can be perceived in the numerous examples and case studies that populate the volume, making it a pleasant read.

Changing Methodologies in TESOL is divided into three key sections: 1) methods and the language learner; 2) the language in methods; and 3) the world in the classroom, plus an introductory chapter to the whole volume. Carefully structured, each chapter includes an introduction, some discussions connecting current debates in TESOL with real teachers in practice, case studies, suggested tasks and further and guided readings. It should also be mentioned that there is additional material available on the publisher’s website for each of the topics covered.

Chapter 1 is an introduction entitled “The Meaning of Methods” and focuses on the concepts of ‘methods’ and ‘methodology’ and why this theoretical side is important for TESOL. Furthermore, it makes the case for the important connection between methods and methodology and actual teaching practice. After this introduction, the first of the three main sections, “Methods and the Language Learner” (comprising Chapters 2 and 3), deals with the impact of learners’ needs, context and culture on language learning and teaching approaches and reflects on how methods take account of the learner.

Chapter 2, “Learning Theories and Methods”, explores teaching methods as responses to teachers’ beliefs and attitudes towards the language learning process and takes an eclectic approach, very much in line with Kumaravadivelu’s point of view (2006). Chapter 3, “The Place of the Learner in Methods”, looks into differences among learners and how teachers should be aware of them so that they can vary their teaching methodology accordingly. As Spiro puts it, “a method is not in itself successful or effective; it is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ as a method only insofar as it ‘fits’ with the learners themselves” (p. 55).

The second section, “The Language in Methods” (Chapters 4-7), turns to the impact of the knowledge of language in methods, from the word to whole texts, including writing, speaking and also the pedagogic approaches to vocabulary and grammar. The latter is the focus of Chapter 4, “Grammar in Methods”. This is one of the few chapters written by another author (Paul Wickens in this case) and it delves into what teachers should know about how learners learn grammar and grammar itself, giving some ideas about how to use corpora as pedagogic resources. Chapter 5 deals with “Vocabulary in Methods” and offers useful strategies for acquiring vocabulary, as well as an overview on the main trends in the teaching of vocabulary today. Chapter 6, “Teacher Knowledge and the Four Language Skills: Understanding Written and Spoken Language in the Twenty-First-Century World”, reflects on the changing pedagogies related to spoken and written language and pays attention to modern concepts such as English as Lingua Franca and World Englishes. However, it is surprising to still find the traditional division into four skills, with no mention of the eight language activities provided by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, which has become an unavoidable benchmark since its publication at the turn of the century: “The language learner/user’s communicative language competence is activated in the performance of the various language activities, involving reception, production, interaction or mediation (in particular interpreting or translating). Each of these types of activity is possible in relation to texts in oral or written form, or both” (p. 14). Finally Chapter 7, “Methods and Principles for Integrating the Four Skills: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening”, complements the previous chapter by showing how to implement the suggested strategies into the aforementioned four skills, proving that there is a necessary interdependence among them.

The third section, “The World in the Classroom”, explores competences that have become essential in the 21st century, from intercultural awareness to digital literacy, paying attention to all the capabilities that are developed when learning a language and how the teacher’s methodology can take account of them. Chapter 8, “Multiple Literacies: Professional, Academic and Web Literacies in Methods” focuses on English for Specific Purposes and the development of multiple literacies, including digital competence. Chapter 9, “Cultural Competences in Methods”, looks at the important role of culture in language learning and provides tips for teachers to enhance their learners’ social, pragmatic and cultural knowledge in the language classroom. Lastly, Chapter 10, “Windows into TESOL Classrooms: Where Are We and Where Are We Going?”, with classroom examples from John Eyles, showcases a wide range of classroom types, which reflect the diverse and complex settings language teachers can come across these days, from the high-technology class to the low-technology one, large or small classes or even self-access ones.

Changing Methodologies in TESOL will be a valuable resource for pre-service TESOL courses. It may also be used in other ways, as a reference book for teacher trainers and even for individual teachers, helping all of them to keep up with the latest developments in the field and those interested in reflecting on their own practice.

REFERENCES

- Council of Europe** (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kumaravadivelu, B.** (2006). TESOL Methods: changing tracks, challenging trends. *TESOL Quarterly* 40(1), 59-81.

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