Title

Writing Myths: Applying Second Language Research to Classroom Teaching - Joy Reid (Ed.)

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/01v4c528

Journal

The CATESOL Journal, 22(1)

ISSN

1535-0517

Author

Cons, Andrea

Publication Date

2011

DOI

10.5070/B5.36226

Copyright Information

The CATESOL Journal

Writing Myths: Applying Second Language Research to Classroom Teaching
Joy Reid (Ed.)
Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008.

ANDREA CONS
University of California, Irvine

Writing Myths: Applying Second Language Research to Classroom Teaching by Joy Reid, with contributors Keith S. Folse, Cynthia M. Schuemann, Pat Byrd and John Bunting, Ken Hyland, Dana Ferris, Susan Conrad, Sharon Cavusgil, and Paul Kei Matsuda, is a valuable resource for secondary and college writing teachers who teach multicultural second language learners. Reid explains how Keith Folse's book *Vocabulary Myths: Applying Second Language Research to Classroom Teaching* (2004) was the inspiration for writing this book. She describes how certain writing myths have prevailed through the years, and even worse, how some writing teachers may be encouraging the continuation of these myths.

In each chapter, the author discusses a myth encountered in his or her research and teaching. Each chapter is divided into three sections: In the Real World, What the Research Says and Shows, and What We Can Do. This organization provides a constructive, pragmatic approach to understanding and addressing myths about writing.

In chapter 1, Keith Folse addresses the myth that teaching vocabulary is not the writing teacher's job. He contends that writing teachers are reluctant to teach vocabulary because they view vocabulary teaching and learning as separate from teaching and learning writing. Folse supports the teaching of vocabulary if it can make students' writing more academic and sophisticated.

In chapter 2, Cynthia Schuemann addresses the myth that teaching citation is someone else's job. She argues that the writing instructor must take responsibility for teaching students how to cite and discusses the types of instruction students require to learn to cite effectively.

In chapter 3, Pat Byrd and John Bunting debunk the "one-size-fits-all" grammar myth. They argue that there is not one all-purpose grammar of English but several overlapping grammars characterized by "sub-sets of grammar and vocabulary" (p. 62). Byrd and Bunting suggest focusing on teaching grammar and vocabulary most characteristic of the type of writing students will need to produce. They also suggest making a connection between grammar and vocabulary so students can understand how they are related and in which contexts to use them.

In chapter 4, Ken Hyland addresses the myth that academic writing must be assertive and certain. He argues that writing is no less persuasive than talking and that "hedges" are just as important as persuasion. In addition, he argues that using language that is too assertive can come across as too forceful and alienate readers rather than persuade them to see the writer's point.

In chapter 5, Dana Ferris addresses the myth that students must learn to correct all their writing errors. She points out that second language acquisition takes time, and, despite teachers' and students' best efforts, achieving 100% accuracy in grammar is nearly impossible. She also suggests that timed writing does not allow students to do their best writing and that they should be taught to take their time with writing. In addition, they should be taught useful editing strategies.

In chapter 6, Susan Conrad debunks the myth that corpus-based research is too complicated to be useful for writing teachers. She recommends referring to corpus-based research only for the type of writing they teach and becoming familiar with the research.

Sharon Cavusgil in chapter 7 addresses the myth that writing courses should focus on paragraph and essay development. She suggests assigning writing tasks that focus more on content than on form. She argues that assigning smaller writing tasks that lead to larger writing tasks is helpful for students.

In chapter 8, Paul Matsuda addresses the myth that international students and US resident ESL writers cannot be taught in the same class. He cautions that he is not claiming that all resident ESL students can or should be placed in the same classroom as international ESL students. Rather, he claims it is possible to teach both groups in the same classroom. For teachers to do this effectively, he suggests they recognize the needs of resident ESL writers and reflect on their own teaching methods, based on changing demographics and students' needs.

Joy Reid concludes the edited volume with a list of students' myths about academic writing. These myths include five "hidden myths" about writing that students often believe:

1. The grammar myth that suggests grammatically correct writing is always good;
2. The inspiration myth that suggests good writing just "hits" the writer;
3. The every-paper-is-a-brand-new-ball-game myth that suggests writing skills are nontransferable;
4. The inoculation myth that suggests writing is a one-time learning experience; and
5. The-writing-teachers-know-the-secrets-of-successful-academic-writing-but-they-won't-tell-students myth.

Aimed at teachers, this book can be used as a handbook for identifying myths about writing, for learning what the research indicates, and finally, as a practical guide for how to dispel these myths. In addition, each chapter provides a clear and understandable chart describing research that has addressed the topic. This allows practitioners to easily access pertinent research.

While the first eight chapters address writing myths based on each author's teaching experience, the concluding chapter addresses myths students hold about academic writing and teaching. Although informative and useful, this chapter does not cohere with the previous chapters and could perhaps be developed into a separate volume.

The authors of the various chapters largely draw from their own rich teaching experiences and expertise as well as professional wisdom and research literature when making pedagogical recommendations. Because the field is so new and the practices they discuss are mostly innovative, suggestions for further research to explore the implementation of the instructional practices that they propose with well-documented groups of multicultural second language learners would have been welcome.

This volume is teacher-friendly and provides real-life solutions to addressing writing myths held by both teachers and students. Practitioners will find this volume informative, useful, and comprehensive.

References

Reid, J. (Ed). (2008). *Writing myths: Applying second language research to classroom teaching.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Folse, K. (2004). *Vocabulary myths: Applying second language research to classroom teaching.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Reader's Choice (5th ed.)
Sandra Silberstein, Barbara K. Dobson, and Mark A. Clarke
Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008.

STEPHANIE EREN
University of California, Los Angeles

Reading is one of the primary means of independent learning. It is arguably the most important skill for students learning a second or foreign (L2) language in the academic context because it enables students to explore vast amounts of new information. Of course, the Internet has made this information accessible and exchangeable at the tap of a finger. Teachers who believe in helping students tackle the fast-paced and ever-present nature of modern reading material will likely value *Reader's Choice,* a textbook for advanced ESL/ EFL students.

The textbook champions the idea that reading is an active skill in which students succeed only by developing efficient and independent strategies. It explains that proficient L2 readers set comprehension goals before beginning and adjust their strategies accordingly. Most important, it urges students to assume responsibility for learning alongside their teacher, who is also expected to share in that responsibility.

Organized around the theme of globalization, the textbook implies that

students must learn to equip themselves with the proper strategies if they want to successfully comprehend the diverse network of worldwide information sharing. With that said, there is a very consistent organization to the textbook, containing 14 units that are arranged into three categories: Odd-numbered units (1-11) focus on language skills exercises; even-numbered units (2-12) supply reading selections with a wide array of topical content and the opportunity to apply the strategies that students have learned. The final two units (13-14) present longer, more complex readings. The first unit familiarizes students with the strategies of skimming, scanning, reading for thorough comprehension, and critical reading. Students must understand the differences between these pivotal techniques before moving on, because the rest of the textbook aims to build on these skills and the students' ability to recognize when to use them.

The units that focus on language skills generally open with a nonprose reading (such as a bus schedule, menu, or questionnaire), followed by comprehension questions. These units also include Word Study sections in which students can find lists of common prefixes, stems, and affixes, and exercises to make guesses about the meanings of related words. The scope of these units expands to Sentence Study, Paragraph Analysis, and Discourse Focus, which focus on a particular strategy, such as navigating complex sentences, identifying a paragraph's main idea, or making predictions about a text. Thus, students may continue to layer their skills. Additionally, the exercises can be completed individually, in pairs, or in small groups. For some students, the number of practice paragraphs and strategy explanations may seem too copious for comfort. However, the language skill units provide a superior footing for the development of students' strategic competence and this kind of scaffolding is a must for cultivating proficiency. In addition, the content of these units is varied and stimulating (the Bible, archaeology in Mexico, etc.).

The units focusing on reading passages are theme based. For instance, one unit focuses on political language policy, another on economics, another on business. The passages are genuine because they are taken directly from real-world domains. They vary from opinion pieces and short stories to economic reports and news articles, just to name a few. The content of the reading passages is consistently unique and thought provoking, such as the article "Can English Be Dethroned?" The passages are followed up, first, with general comprehension checks (such as T/F) and then with more critical discussion questions that seem best completed in pair work or small groups. Often, the textbook suggests a related composition prompt.

Internet excerpts are scattered amply throughout the textbook. Although they are certainly authentic samples of real-life Internet usage and provide skimming or scanning practice, their inclusion seems almost excessive at times. It is almost as if the textbook is openly endorsing certain web-based companies, such as popular search engines or travel websites. It is a feature of the textbook that will quickly become outdated since Internet fads do come and go.

Fortunately, the textbook is consistent about previewing each unit with a schema-activation exercise. Each exercise includes one or two questions that

prompt the student to access his or her background knowledge or opinions on a forthcoming topic. The 5th edition also features many improvements, such as the emphasis on globalization and visual literacy (comprehending combinations of text and graphics), web work, and additional readings, vocabulary, and skills work.

It seems reasonable to say that the aspect *Reader's Choice* is lacking the most is exactly the aspect that sets it apart from other textbooks. Specifically, the textbook does not expect students to understand everything. In fact, it actually encourages students *not* to learn all of the new vocabulary. Yet the approach behind this apparent indifference is admirable, as students must learn to trust their inferences and predictions about complex texts. It is true they must learn *when* to engage the appropriate strategy to maximize comprehension. However, students must also become comfortable with ambiguity. This, the textbook argues, is the essence of becoming a successful independent reader.

Grammar Connection: Structure Through Content, Level 4
Noël Houck and Sharon Hilles
Boston, MA: Heinle Cengage, 2009.

ALEXANDER T. IBARAKI
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

Moving English learners from basic to intermediate and advanced grammatical structures is part of the task of every ESL/EFL professional. With *Grammar Connection: Structure Through Content, Level 4,* Noël Houck and Sharon Hilles have made this sometimes difficult task more manageable for the teacher and more interesting for the learner. This text focuses on advanced grammatical structures and is aimed at college-bound young adult and adult intermediate to advanced learners of English. This book encompasses a holistic approach to grammar instruction that includes content-based grammar, high-frequency academic vocabulary, and communicative instruction aimed at providing students with a truly balanced and informative text.

The first part of the book provides students with a brief review of the tense/aspect system and future time. Each tense and tense/aspect combination is presented individually and then compared to similar tense/aspect combinations. Learners are presented with comparisons between conceptually difficult tense/aspect combinations such as simple present and present perfect to reinforce the sometime subtle differences. To supplement this review, the authors also provide more advanced concepts dealing with the tense/aspect system such as tense sequencing in discourse and the use of the simple present as a tool for presenting background information in discourse.

The authors follow the initial review of the tense/aspect system with a comprehensive look at advanced grammatical concepts, many of which English

language learners consistently find difficult to grasp. These concepts include article usage, the use of this, that, those, and these in discourse, relative clauses, hypotheticals and conditionals, the passive voice, noun clauses, and the myriad uses of the English modal auxiliary system.

What sets *Grammar Connection* apart from the vast array of grammar texts available is its presentation of grammatical concepts. Each of the 30 chapters is devoted to a grammatical concept that is thematically presented within the context of a distinct academic subject. Modals, for example, are presented within the context of health sciences and infectious diseases while relative clauses are presented within the context of anthropology, specifically body art and tattooing. These academic contexts allow the learner to focus on the grammatical form in consistent thematic contexts rather than random unrelated sentences.

Each chapter is broken down into three sections: an introductory text, information on the grammatical form, and a multitude of practice exercises. The introductory text, either a written text or a transcribed spoken interaction with the focal grammar form in bold letters, focuses learner attention on the form. Informative grammar charts provide sentence-level examples and the meaning(s) of the grammatical form along with other pertinent metalinguistic information. Practice exercises vary widely from information gap/cloze activities, sentence construction, and error analysis to pair-work dialogue practice, writing prompts, listening exercises, and Internet research projects. Each exercise is designed to elicit the focal grammatical structure naturally.

Additionally, features that the learner and teacher might find useful include learner logs and the appendices. The learner logs provide the learner with a tool to monitor his or her progress. Each log appears every five chapters and comes in the form of a grammar checklist. Learners can check the box indicating that they understand and know how to use each of the grammatical forms covered in the previous five chapters or they can check the box indicating a need for more practice.

In the appendices, the authors provide several helpful reference tables to complement chapters in the text. The appendices include a table of inseparable and separable phrasal verbs, examples of verbs followed by gerunds and infinitives, common irregular verbs, a glossary of grammatical terminology, and an answer key for the practice exercises.

Although this text provides an excellent and comprehensive look at more advanced grammatical structures, one negative aspect might be the fact that this text is geared toward a highly specific type of English learner—the advanced college/university-bound student. The content provided in each chapter is strictly geared for university-bound students and as such is fairly difficult. This is by no means a grammar text that students will be able to coast through.

Houck and Hilles's fourth installment of *Grammar Connection* is a grammar text that is interesting, interactive, and most important, relevant to its target user, the academically inclined English learner. Additionally, teachers who use this text as a resource will have well-structured and inspired lesson plans right at their fingertips. This innovative holistic approach to grammar learning provides a refreshing divergence from traditional grammar pedagogy.

Excellent English 3: Language Skills for Success
Mary A. Maynard, Ingrid Wisniewska, Jan Forstrom, Marta Pitt,
and Shirley Velasco
White Plains, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2008.

JUNGEUN KIM
California State University, Fullerton

*E*xcellent *English 3: Language Skills for Success* has been developed for inter-
mediate-level adult ESL learners. The book integrates listening, speaking,
reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, civics/life, and math
skills. The book is designed to help learners increase their fluency in English by
dealing with real-life issues. It emphasizes the language people need for real-
world communication.

The book is organized around clearly recognized sections. The book con-
tains 12 units, which are organized around topics that students are likely to
encounter in real-life situations such as work, citizenship, health, community,
and the environment. Each unit consists of seven lessons and each lesson deals
with separate language skills. An assessment section that comes after each unit
offers instructors and students a way to monitor and assess students' learning
progress and achievement.

Lesson sequences in each unit are well thought out to promote student
comprehension. The text provides vocabulary early so that students will get the
idea of the content in each unit. New vocabulary and grammar are introduced
through a picture dictionary, and learners also learn vocabulary through read-
ing in context. Among the seven lessons in each unit, four deal with grammar
and vocabulary. This grammar-oriented series encourages learners to repeat
and review grammar points previously covered through subtopics.

Listening, speaking, and pronunciation are combined in the lessons. An
audio CD is provided for listening activities. However, speaking parts are only
lightly covered after each listening activity. Questions are given after each lis-
tening section and check students' comprehension after guided-listening prac-
tice.

The reading lessons often include writing skills. Questions provided before
the reading passages help students build reading strategies such as prediction
by examining the title of the article. In the reading lesson, the comprehension
activity is usually writing text based on the reading passage, and in the writ-
ing lesson, students are required to read first before they write. Therefore, each
writing lesson presented also teaches reading skills in an integrated fashion.

The text contains some relevant skills necessary for students to become
successful both in real-life situations and in an academic environment. For in-
stance, in each unit basic math skills are dealt with through language activities
to help students develop functional numerical skills. In addition, topics such
as civics concepts (e.g., citizenship and government) encourage learners to be-
come more active and informed members of their communities.

On the other hand, the book focuses a little bit too much on grammatical

aspects, as more than half of the lessons from each unit deal with grammar and vocabulary. Each unit begins with learning selected features of grammar in isolation. There is a student workbook in addition to the main textbook. However, the workbook also focuses mainly on grammar activities derived from the main text. Although the book includes communication practice, this section is much smaller than that of the grammar practice. There is much less speaking practice than there is for the other language skills. Teachers should note that students' oral skills will be optimized if they focus on grammatical aspects within a communicative context.

Another weakness is that the words in the vocabulary section are not revisited as much as they should be. Repetition of vocabulary is important, because students can acquire target words implicitly through practice and follow-up activities.

A strength of this book is that it deals with real-life issues by providing authentic topics and situations, which can promote student motivation. Explanations of vocabulary and reading sections provide authentic situations. Students may also derive the meaning of vocabulary in context by reading short paragraphs provided in the vocabulary section. The unit also includes photographs of real people, which can be realistic and interesting to students.

Another strength of *Excellent English 3* is that it deals with different language skills separately but in an integrated fashion under the same topics. For instance, an outcome of a listening lesson is speaking practice, and similarly, an outcome of a reading lesson is writing. Therefore, students can practice different skills at the same time and they encounter different skills that are necessary to succeed in the target language area. Moreover, grammar skills are repeated throughout the unit, which helps students to practice and memorize the structural rules in the long term. In addition, the design of the book is attractive and contains many colorful pictures and illustrations. The picture dictionary at the beginning of each section of a unit can be especially motivating and gives ideas of what each unit is about.

Excellent English 3 should be recommended because it may please instructors working with adult language learners and inspire adult immigrants who are adjusting to a new environment and eager to fit into an English-speaking society.

Real Grammar: A Corpus-Based Approach to English
Susan Conrad and Douglas Biber
White Plains, NY: Pearson Longman, 2009.

MIRALYNN MALUPA-KIM
Alliant International University

Teaching grammar: Do we teach according to rules or according to how speakers use it on a daily basis? *Real Grammar: A Corpus-Based Approach*

to English offers the opportunity to teach both. Drawing from what the students already know about English grammar, this book contrasts the use of grammar in specific registers, such as conversation, different reading and writing genres, and the like. The book is based on a corpus, which the authors define as "a large, carefully designed collection of spoken and written texts, analyzed with the help of computers, and used for studying language" (p. viii).

Real Grammar has 50 independent lesson units and is organized into 11 parts. The first five parts concentrate heavily on verbs: tenses, special uses, modals, multiword verbs, and voice. The remaining parts discuss other parts of speech and other complex structures. The book is organized from easy structures to the more complicated ones. Depending on the grammar structure, some of the activities include noticing, analyzing discourse, analyzing and editing, practice conversation, and practice writing. It includes helpful icons: conversation, writing, academic writing, and newspaper and academic writing, indicating in which registers the target grammar structures are most frequently used.

Each unit has a set of activities. These activities, which are mostly devised for individual work, allow students to practice the target structure(s). The first activity in each unit is a noticing activity in which learners are asked to highlight target structures. Some structures need more than just "noticing," so the teacher needs to incorporate more critical-thinking practice by adding questions or creating prompts about how the structures are used in context. Other activities encourage the use of the target structure(s) in a more practical manner, although more materials from authentic sources could have been used.

Teachers and students in IEPs (Intensive English Programs) and ESP (English for Specific Purposes) programs will greatly benefit from this book because of the emphasis on registers and the spoken versus written forms. Both settings require learners to be well versed in both to be able to function in their respective communities: education, business, and medical, for example. *Real Grammar* is intended as a supplement for students at the high-intermediate to advanced levels of English proficiency. Using it with students of lower proficiency levels may create more confusion; learners at lower proficiency levels should concentrate more on mastering structures than on examining alternatives.

Real Grammar is also ideal for new teachers, both native and nonnative speakers of English. ESOL teachers who are native English speakers (NES) will find this book a valuable resource for those difficult-to-explain usages, such as the adjectives good and nice (Unit 24). Sometimes the most commonly used elements are the most difficult to explain. This book helps teachers offer more effective explanations. On the other hand, ESOL teachers who are not native speakers of English (NNES) may find the discourse section and practice activities enriching. It also helps in dealing with the cultural aspects of the target language (e.g., colloquialisms).

Other than in a grammar and/or writing class, this book may also be used as a supplement in oral communication classes, such as academic speaking. The teacher may focus on the discourse and conversation activities through audio and video recording. On the other hand, the teacher may also seek the use of

technology by introducing different communicative platforms, such as formal class discussion forums, blogs, and wikis. The target structures may then be examined and assessed holistically. *Real Grammar* is flexible and may be adapted for this use.

Overall, *Real Grammar* offers a unique approach to teaching grammar. It responds to the demands of teaching and learning English as a global language encompassing all possible genres and registers. Learners need to be able to distinguish the differences in language use across genres and registers as well as use the language appropriately. Using this book would be a good place to start such learning.

Making Content Comprehensible for Secondary English Learners:
The SIOP Model (3rd ed.)
Jana Echevarría, MaryEllen Vogt, and Deborah J. Short
Boston: Pearson Education, 2010.

JUDY NGUYEN
California State University, Fullerton

The SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) model was developed for English learners in secondary education content courses. Echevarría, Vogt, and Short wrote *Making Content Comprehensible for Secondary English Learners: The SIOP Model* as a teacher's resource book that guides educators on how to use the SIOP model for this group of English language learners.

Echevarría, Vogt, and Short's work is primarily focused on literacy and facilitating student achievement in literacy. National educational accountability through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has urged teachers to develop models that could sufficiently address both the English learners' language and content needs.

This push for national accountability is a highly debatable topic in every statewide education system. Immigrant students are expected to not only meet the criteria for their content learning (mathematics, sciences, etc.) but also to possess English reading skills comparable to those of their peers in only 30 months of formal English instruction (Gunning, 2005). In other words, students would have to miraculously acquire, in 2.5 years, English skills that their native English-speaking peers have had many years to develop. This has driven teachers and specialists of English to speakers of other languages to develop and implement teaching models that can achieve this goal.

Making Content Comprehensible for Secondary English Learners is a resource handbook that attempts to tackle this feat. By using the SIOP model, teachers can address the students' content needs alongside their English language development. Therefore, this resource handbook is applicable to not just

secondary education teachers, but also to educators of adult language learners who would like a view on what is seen as one way to fast-track language acquisition.

This teacher-training book features the SIOP model, which in turn is meant to help implement SDAIE (Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English) to nonnative English speakers in the secondary education classroom. Although this book may not be outwardly addressed to adult learner populations, it is still based on the same principles of making content comprehensible, or understandable, to all English learners.

The resource book opens with acknowledgments and the ongoing trends in teaching English to speakers of other languages in the American grade-school classroom. Echevarría, Vogt, and Short present their SIOP model as a guideline to assist learners with both their content comprehension and English language development. This model, as they state, has been thoroughly tested and researched as a tool that can improve student literacy and achievement.

Making Content Comprehensible for Secondary English Learners is highly applicable in the teacher-training classroom. Each chapter opens with a graphic organizer of its contents and principles for comprehensibility, followed by content and language objectives for its readers. Each chapter presents the 30 SIOP features in a fluid succession for teacher consideration, as well as a summary and discussion questions to enhance teacher comprehension.

In addition, each chapter is packed with current trends and research findings from the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. This assures teachers that its suggested activities have been researched and proven effective. This allows teachers who may know little about TESOL to jump into the system and apply its principles in a meaningful and productive way.

The most memorable features of this book are the teaching scenarios at the end of each chapter. These scenarios apply the features presented in the chapter and include a critique by the authors. This feature allows teachers to take the textbook practically into the classroom. With a proper scenario in mind, teachers can monitor their own performance and apply ideas and principles to their own teaching methods.

However, the formatting and sequencing of this book need improvement. Although the SIOP features have been impressively discussed in a cohesive, comprehensible manner, the authors' suggested activities are scattered throughout the pages. These suggested activities are marked with a distinguishable graphic for easy recognition, yet they need to be sought out thoroughly within a chapter or recalled from memory. For example, the activity Vocabulary Games (p. 70) is placed within chapter 3: Building Background. However, chapter 5: Strategies, can also be an appropriate topic for using vocabulary games, as is chapter 6: Interaction. These activities may have been more accessible in a corresponding "activities handbook" to supplement the text. Also, these activities may have been more useful if they were grouped in an appendix for quick and easy reference.

Overall, *Making Content Comprehensible for Secondary English Learners* is an excellent resource and a must-read for all secondary education school-

teachers with English learner populations. It is a digestible text for teachers who may be preparing for their first sheltered-instruction class. It also allows teachers, experienced and nonexperienced alike, to properly equip themselves with a framework to assist English language learners in both their content and language objectives.

Reference

Gunning, T. G. (2005). *Creating literacy: Instruction for all students* (5th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Excellent English 2: Language Skills for Success
Jan Forstrom, Mari Vargo, Marta Pitt, and Shirley Velasco
New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008.

SHU-WEI PENG
California State University, Fullerton

*E*xcellent English is a four-level series textbook that focuses on the four learning skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) for adult English language learners. It integrates meaningful and interactional contexts such as lifestyle topics (e.g., Places in My Life, Food and Nutrition, and Success at Work), picture dictionaries (e.g., match correct words based on pictures), and math skills (e.g., calculate how many hours an individual works according to the passage). *Excellent English* also provides many colorful pictures that reinforce students' impressions in learning new English vocabulary. The authors believe that the materials in this book will prepare learners for vocational or educational challenges. For example, it can help students enter a college or university or assist them in getting a better job.

Excellent English 2: Language Skills for Success is intended for a beginning-high-level ESL class and contains 12 units. Concentrating on people's daily lives in order to develop English learners' career and academic English, each unit includes eight two-page lessons that center upon vocabulary, grammar, and the four learning skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). This textbook comes with four audio CDs that provide students opportunities to learn both inside and outside of the classroom. The text starts with family and community issues and then moves into jobs and educational goals. These topics motivate students to discuss their previous or present experiences.

The first and fourth lessons in each unit usually begin with a picture dictionary, with which learners are introduced to new vocabulary through various listening activities. These lessons build English learners' schemata and reinforce their interests in the unit. Vocabulary and grammar are emphasized to increase students' knowledge, especially those who have just begun learning English. English learners are encouraged to work in pairs or groups, practicing conver-

sations and discussing their opinions related to real-life situations at the end of the lesson. It is a great way for teachers to monitor students' learning progress.

Grammar practice in lessons 2 and 5 provides students opportunities to use English productively. Students are guided to write or to complete sentences using grammar structures that they have acquired during a lesson. For example, when learning quantifiers to describe count/noncount nouns, students are asked to create sentences related to the lesson topic (e.g., "I have *a couple of* lemons" and "I would like *some* tea"). This strategy assists students not only in building their writing skills but also reinforces their ability to apply English knowledge.

Learners in lessons 3 and 6 hear a variety of listening input (e.g., monologues or dialogues) and are encouraged to take notes while listening, a useful activity to promote comprehension. Students are also led to practice conversations with peers collaboratively and sometimes are asked to change key sentences provided in the textbook. For instance, having students rephrase or paraphrase sentences in communication will assist them to fully understand the English meanings. As a result, students may learn to communicate successfully with others.

Lesson 7 starts with a reading exercise that mainly centers on short passages with prereading, during reading, and postreading activities. Working individually, such as writing a passage or a paragraph, is always at the very end of the lesson because students usually comprehend better after finishing the previous unit's lessons. Students are able to apply learned English vocabulary words and grammar to their writing. Meanwhile, teachers can check students' comprehension and monitor their writing skills.

The teaching philosophy of this book is to help English learners become aware of life-skill topics and civics concepts and to encourage critical thinking. To meet these goals, authentic materials are usually provided in listening, speaking, reading, and writing sections, which provide teachers opportunities to apply a communicative teaching strategy. Visual aids such as graphs are often used to help learners access their schemata. For example, pictures of foods and restaurants are provided at the beginning of the unit Food and Nutrition, so English learners' background knowledge will be fully developed. *Excellent English* comes with a workbook that also includes eight lessons in each unit, providing learners the opportunity to work independently at home.

Another feature in this book is grammar and vocabulary, which offers students opportunities to learn grammar via conversation models. First, learners preview new English grammar structures and vocabulary as they listen and read dialogues or monologues. Second, learners repeat what they heard and find key words. Third, teachers assign sentences to be written related to the grammar and vocabulary reviewed. Last, meaningful vocabulary usage is emphasized. This feature allows students to have many opportunities to practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing effectively.

However, one aspect of the textbook could be improved. The text lacks communicative activities such as information-gap, jigsaw, or role-play activities. The only opportunity for students to interact with peers is to ask questions

or practice the conversations provided in the textbook. Therefore, teachers will need to spend extra time preparing supplemental materials to provide more varied opportunities for communication.

Excellent English promotes a whole-language approach that introduces the four language skills at the same time. Teachers will find that this textbook is a good tool to assist beginning-level students to learn efficiently in or out of the classroom.

Word Knowledge: A Vocabulary Teacher's Handbook
Cheryl Boyd Zimmerman
Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2008.

DEBRA S. THIERCOF
California State University, Fullerton

The ability of language teachers to make insightful observations about word choice is an important one, yet even those with experience may struggle to describe lexical features to their students. *Word Knowledge: A Vocabulary Teacher's Handbook* by Cheryl Boyd Zimmerman is a practical resource for both new and experienced instructors, and one that those teaching vocabulary will reach for often.

The process of learning vocabulary in a second or foreign language is complex, and the more teachers understand this process, the better they can address learners' needs. For proficient speakers, much of word knowledge is implicitly known; it is guided by intuition rather than by conscious thought. Teachers must first develop the skill of analyzing why we make the word choices we do in order to better assist students in developing this skill. A key element to developing word consciousness is understanding what it means to know a word. This book identifies five layers of word knowledge—meaning(s), collocations, grammatical features, word parts, register and other language variation—and devotes a chapter to explaining each layer. The introduction gives an overview of these layers and provides key considerations for the classroom. The final chapter focuses on independent word learning and imparts effective methods for guiding students to this level.

Each chapter begins with an engaging, often humorous, quotation or example that illustrates the element of word knowledge presented in that chapter. Zimmerman notes in the Preface that most of the examples used in the book were gathered by her or her graduate students from English language learners. This lends an air of authenticity to the material while acknowledging the sometimes confusing and often idiosyncratic nature of language and vocabulary.

One idea threaded throughout this entire handbook is that word learning is incremental. Language learners need to encounter a word several times before they fully understand it and can use it proficiently. Zimmerman points out

that students need about 10 encounters with a word before it is fully retained, so repetition and practice are important. Each time a learner meets a word, he or she notices new features and each layer of knowledge adds to the learner's understanding of the word. Teachers are advised to be selective about the words they target and to take into consideration the "learning burden" of a word, or the amount of effort needed to master it (Laufer, 1990; Nation, 2001). Other factors also come into play, such as the spacing of intervals between encounters and the contexts in which the word is presented. These issues are addressed through the presentation of classroom activities provided in the book.

Each chapter of this book concludes with key considerations for the classroom; this sound advice sums up the most important concepts in that chapter and give teachers ways to put the ideas to immediate use. One of the best features of this book is the collection of classroom activities at the end of each chapter that are designed to give students practice at the word level. In addition, many activities give suggestions for further practice at the sentence level. An answer key to the activities is provided at the back of the book. While the book does not identify a particular age or proficiency level that the exercises are intended for, they would seem most appropriate for university students at the intermediate or higher level. However, most of the activities could be adapted for use with younger students or those at lower proficiency levels.

This is a compact handbook of 154 pages; readers will find the text concise and the examples clear and comprehensible. Of particular value is the discussion in the final chapter, which takes a closer look at independent word learning and the strategies that students can use long after they leave the classroom. The chart on page 115 gives examples of the types of feedback that teachers can give to students to help them develop these word-learning strategies. Even veteran teachers may underestimate the challenge of providing clear explanations of lexical anomalies, as so much of this knowledge is known implicitly. While this chart provides a good starting point, teachers will benefit from practicing with their own students' lexical data to become skilled at giving clear, useful observations. Dictionary use and memory aids are some of the additional strategies discussed in this chapter to assist the student in becoming a lifelong word learner.

Overall, *Word Knowledge* is a well-organized and useful handbook with rich task resources for language teachers. This would be an indispensable book for both ESL and EFL instructors who are looking for insight into the complex nature of word learning and creative classroom activities to facilitate their students' vocabulary acquisition.

References

Laufer, B. (1990). Why are some words more difficult than others?: Some intralexical factors that affect the learning of words. *IRAL, 28*(4), 293-308.

Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.