

Book Reviews

This is an ongoing column, featuring reviews of books and other materials for ESOL teachers and students. Please send submissions to the column editor, Elizabeth Fonseca, at columns@idiom.nystesol.org.

Ruddell, Martha Rapp. *Teaching Content Reading and Writing* (5th ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2008.
by Lubie Grujicic-Alatraste

Teacher education textbooks are a challenge to write and use. They typically cover a lot of ground, being ambitious in scope and purpose. This textbook is no exception. It contains 12 chapters over some 500 pages—a lot to read, let alone process, in one 15-week semester. *Teaching Content Reading and Writing* targets undergraduate/graduate education courses, including TESOL/applied linguistics or related fields. The textbook refers to middle and high school teachers, but seems appropriate for most teacher-education programs that include literacy in content-area courses.

Each chapter covers one specific domain of educational theory and issues in teaching and learning. Chapter One traces the history of literacy and highlights the growing need for reading and writing support in all courses (Grujicic-Alatraste, 2011). Chapter Two introduces language/thinking processes, and Chapter Three presents evaluating textbook materials. Chapters Four and Five deal with content-area vocabulary learning, each offering diverse instructional models. Chapter Six introduces bilingual/bicultural issues, while Chapters Seven and Eight cover reading and writing across the curriculum, respectively. They are applicable to all classes—ESL, bilingual, mainstream, or content areas—as the theory and methods are relevant to students in any classroom, particularly in urban settings. Chapter Nine addresses assessment, while Chapter Ten discusses diversity. The final two chapters focus on collaboration in learning and ways of developing lifelong readers/writers. Both chapters are very well put together, useful and motivational.

In addition to the many strengths mentioned above, some aspects could be reconsidered for the next edition. For example, Chapter Three seems out of place and would be better housed at the end of the book, because materials/book evaluation is not central to teaching literacy and teachers rarely select textbooks; having such extensive instruction on how to evaluate materials takes away from teaching methods. In Chapter Four, Ruddell does a fine job of including examples and step-by-step teaching techniques, but the sheer volume of material is overwhelming even for a seasoned professional. In addition, housing two big units in one chapter, particularly if one, a lesson plan unit, is central to learning to teach, is not the happiest organizational system, and perhaps the lesson plan section should be a separate chapter. This said, Ruddell does a fine job of providing class transcripts for different lesson plans.

Each chapter opens with a double-entry journal, followed by a narrative of a real-life situation, forecasting the chapter's contents. These two activities are true strengths: they engage the student readers on a personal level and allow for reflection and problem solving. Similarly, "What this chapter means to me" is a personalized way to conclude the material covered. Chapters end with further readings and references (although some,

e.g., Chapter Four, should be updated). The “How to Do” segments are meant to help the applicability of the chapter, but may need to be more scaffolded (Vygotsky, 1978). The organization of this book is easy to follow, utilizing headings, charts and forms, though some evaluation scales are incredibly detailed and intimidating (e.g., p. 73, “Friendly Text Evaluation Scale; pp. 231 & 284, “Building Table”). It may be helpful for the author to reconsider the level of detail or the necessity to include these tables.

Finally, because the chapters appear only loosely connected, the teacher/instructor can decide to use individual chapters, or the entire book. As Farr and Tulley (1985) suggest, teachers should not confuse the textbook with the curriculum, and may wish to select only key information to prevent cognitive overload. Perhaps reducing the theoretical content and focusing on how to apply fewer techniques may be changes to consider for future editions.

References

- Farr, R., & Tulley, M. A. (1985). Do adoption committees perpetuate mediocre textbooks? *Phi Delta Kappan*, 66, 467–471.
- Grujicic-Alatrisme, L. (2011). Test prep: Yes, you can make it a real learning experience—and fun! *NYS TESOL Idiom*, 41(1), 4–5.
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