# Introduction

This book seeks to provide an overview of current approaches, issues, and practices in the teaching of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). It has the following goals:

- to provide a comprehensive overview of the field of second and foreign language teaching, with a particular focus on issues related to the teaching of English
- to provide a source of teaching principles and classroom activities which teachers can refer to in their work
- to provide a source of readings and activities that can be used in TESOL teacher-education programs, for both preservice and in-service courses

The articles in this anthology offer a comprehensive picture of approaches to the teaching of English and illustrate the complexity underlying many of the practical planning and instructional activities it involves. These activities include teaching English at elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels, teacher training, language testing, curriculum and materials development, the use of computers and other technology in teaching, as well as research on different aspects of second language learning. The issues that form the focus of attention in TESOL around the world reflect the contexts in which English is taught and used. English in different parts of the world where it is not a native language may have the status of either a "second" or a "foreign" language. In the former case, it is a language that is widely used in society and learners need to acquire English in order to survive in society. In the latter case, it may be taught as a school subject but has restricted uses in society at large. Learners of English may be studying American, Canadian, Australian, British, or some other variety of English. They may be learning it for educational, occupational, or social purposes. They may be in a formal classroom setting or studying independently, using a variety of media and resources. The teachers of English may be native speakers of English or those for whom it is a second or foreign language.

The issues seen to be important at any particular point in time and the approaches to teaching that are followed in different parts of the world reflect contextual factors such as those just mentioned, current understanding of the nature of second language learning, educational trends and practices in different parts of the world, and the priorities the profession accords to specific issues and practices. In the last 30 years or so, the field of Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language has developed into a dynamic worldwide community of language teaching professionals that seeks to improve the quality of language teaching and learning through addressing the key issues that shape the design and delivery of language teaching. These issues center on

- understanding learners and their roles, rights, needs, motivations, strategies, and the processes they employ in second language learning
- understanding the nature of language teaching and learning and the roles teachers, teaching methods, and teaching materials play in facilitating successful learning
- understanding how English functions in the lives of learners, the way the English language works, the particular difficulties it poses for second language learners, and how learners can best achieve their goals in learning English
- understanding how schools, classrooms, communities, and the language teaching profession can best support the teaching and learning of English

It is this view of teaching that has guided the selection of articles for this anthology. The anthology brings together articles which have been published in journals in many different parts of the world but which deal with issues that are of importance no matter where English is being taught. (Only three articles in the collection – those by Farrell, Lewis, and Renandya and Jacobs – have not been published previously.) The goal of the collection is to bring together in one volume articles which treat the range of issues normally included in TESOL methodology courses. We have sought to include only recent articles or articles that present perspectives that are still current. Most of the articles in the collection, therefore, have been published within the last 5 years. Nearly 70% of the articles have been published since 1996, and of the rest, none was published before 1992. The following topics are included:

- *the nature of teaching* – methods, teaching skills
- *classroom interaction and management* – lesson planning, grouping, classroom dynamics
- *teaching the skills* – reading, writing, listening, speaking
- *understanding learner variables* – learning strategies, motivation, age
- *addressing linguistic competence* – grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation
- *curriculum factors* – syllabus design, materials development
- *assessment of learning* – alternative assessment, proficiency tests
- *the role of technology* – video, computers, the Internet
- *teacher development* – evaluating teaching, classroom research, action research

The book is organized into sixteen sections that reflect these topics. Each section includes a balance of articles that address both theory and practice. Key issues in relevant theory and research are presented. At the same time, classroom practitioners show not only how theory can inform classroom practice, but also how the practical realities of teaching can inform theory and research.

Two sets of discussion questions are included. One set serves as prereading questions and seeks to explore some of the background knowledge, beliefs, and practical experience

that student teachers and teachers in training possess and that can provide a source of reference when reading each article. The second set of questions is designed to be used after the section has been read and seeks to engage the readers in critical reflection on the issues discussed, as well as to provide application to teaching practice. We hope that student teachers, teachers, and teacher educators will find the collection a useful resource for the understanding of current approaches and practices in the teaching of English as a second or foreign language.

# SECTION 1

# APPROACHES TO TEACHING

## INTRODUCTION

The two papers in this section reexamine the notion of methods of teaching and offer complementary perspectives on how the nature of teaching can be understood. Although for much of the twentieth century a primary concern of the language teaching profession was to find more effective methods of language teaching, by the twenty-first century there has been a movement away from a preoccupation with generic teaching methods toward a more complex view of language teaching which encompasses a multifaceted understanding of the teaching and learning processes. Brown traces this movement from a preoccupation with "methods" to a focus on "pedagogy."

The notion of teaching methods has had a long history in language teaching, as is witnessed by the rise and fall of a variety of methods throughout the recent history of language teaching. Some, such as Audiolingualism, became the orthodox teaching methods of the 1970s in many parts of the world. Other guru-led methods such as the Silent Way attracted small but devoted followers in the 1980s and beyond, but attract little attention today. Many teachers have found the notion of methods attractive over the last one hundred or so years, since they offer apparently foolproof systems for classroom instruction and are hence sometimes embraced enthusiastically as a panacea for the "language teaching problem." The 1970s and 1980s were perhaps the years of greatest enthusiasm for methods. In what has been called the "post-methods era," attention has shifted to teaching and learning processes and the contributions of the individual teacher to language teaching pedagogy.

Brown discusses a number of reasons for the decline of the methods syndrome in contemporary discussions of language teaching. As he and others have commented, the

notion of all-purpose "designer methods" that will work anywhere and for everyone raises a number of problems:

- Methods are typically top-down impositions of experts' views of teaching. The role of the individual teacher is minimized. His or her role is to apply the method and adapt his or her teaching style to make it conform to the method. Methods are hence prescriptive.

- Methods fail to address the broader contexts of teaching and learning and focus on only one small part of a more complex set of elements. Brown describes what may be called a "curriculum development" approach to teaching, which begins with diagnosis (i.e., needs analysis, syllabus, and materials development), then moves to treatment (i.e., instruction and pedagogy), and involves issues of assessment (i.e., testing and evaluation).

For Brown, the term *method* is best replaced by the term *pedagogy*. The former implies a static set of procedures, whereas the latter suggests the dynamic interplay between teachers, learners, and instructional materials during the process of teaching and learning. Brown characterizes the basis of language teaching pedagogy in terms of twelve principles that reflect current research and theory about second language acquisition.

Richards seeks to show how three different conceptions of teaching in the recent history of language teaching have led to different understandings of the essential skills of teachers and to different approaches to teacher training and teacher development. *Science-research conceptions* of teaching seek to develop teaching methods from applications of research, and see improvements in teaching as dependent on research into learning, motivation, memory, and related factors. Good teaching is a question of applying the findings of research. Task-Based Language Teaching and attempts to apply brain research to teaching are current examples of this approach. *Theory-philosophy conceptions* of teaching derive from rational "commonsense" understandings of teaching or from one's ideology or value system, rather than from research. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a good example of this approach, since it is based on an ideology rather than a research agenda, as are such movements as Critical Theory and Critical Pedagogy. Advocates of these movements see their mission as to convince teachers of the correctness of the theory, to review their teaching to see to what extent it matches their values, and to seek to incorporate the relevant principles or values into their teaching. *Art-craft conceptions* of teaching, by comparison, see good teaching as something unique and personal to teachers. A teaching theory is viewed as something that is constructed by individual teachers. From this perspective, teaching is viewed as driven by teachers' attempts to integrate theory and practice. Teacher-education programs give teachers a grounding in academic theory and research, which they test out against the practical realities of teaching. In so doing, they create their own new understandings of teaching, which are expanded and revised as they tackle new problems and deepen their experiential and knowledge base of teaching.

Many of the issues highlighted in this section will reappear throughout this collection of papers. In many of the papers, the writers describe approaches to teaching which are informed by educational theory and practice and exemplify many of the issues Brown touches on in his paper, as well as one or another of the conceptions of teaching described by Richards. At the same time, many of the papers illustrate the personal and unique solutions to problems and issues that individual teachers or groups of teachers often find in their teaching, demonstrating that for many teachers the day-to-day process of teaching is a kind of ongoing research and experimentation.

## Discussion Questions

*Before Reading*

1. What experience do you have of learning a second or foreign language? How would you characterize the teacher's teaching method? How effective did you find it?
2. What do you understand by a teaching "method" and what is the source of different methods? How do methods often differ from one another?
3. Is your teaching based on a particular method of teaching? If so, how did you learn to teach in this way?
4. Do you agree that the notion of "method" presents a restrictive view of the nature of teaching? When might it be useful to teach according to a specific method?
5. How do you understand the differences between an "approach" and a "method"? Is this a useful distinction?
6. Why do you think many teachers are attracted to the idea of "a best method"?
7. What are the three most important principles that you think a teacher has to be aware of in teaching an ESL class? Where do these (and other principles) come from?
8. Some learners appear to be more effective language learners than others because they use more effective learning strategies. What do you understand by a "learning strategy"? Can you give examples of strategies that successful learners might use?
9. How important do you think risk taking is in language learning?
10. What role do you think motivation plays in learning a language? How can learner motivation be developed?
11. Which of these words do you think can be used to describe teaching? What view of teaching do these terms suggest to you: *a science, a profession, an art, a craft, a technology, an industry?*
12. What role does theory play in shaping teaching practice? Is good practice dependent on theory?

*After Reading*

1. Examine the twelve principles proposed by Brown. Do some of them seem more important than others? Are there any you would wish to add or delete?
2. How can teachers gather and make use of the kind of information Brown discusses under "diagnosis"?
3. Examine the suggestions Brown gives for developing "strategic investment." Can you suggest other activities that address each of the ten principles Brown discusses?
4. Select a group of learners you are familiar with. What do you think are their primary motivations for learning English? In what ways can learner motivations be explored and addressed in a language program?
5. Reflect on your own experiences as a language learner. To what extent were you taught strategies for language learning? Did you develop independently an awareness of the importance of strategies? What examples can you give?
6. What do you think is the role of research in improving our understanding of teaching?
7. How do you think teachers develop their ideas about teaching? What sources do you think shape their beliefs and practice?

8. What do you think are the most essential skills of a good language teacher? What is the source of your ideas about the nature of teaching skills?
9. Describe your personal philosophy of teaching and some of the key beliefs about teachers, learners, and teaching that influence your approach to teaching. How would this philosophy be evident to someone observing you teaching a class?
10. How do you think teachers change their approach to teaching over time? What do you think are some of the differences between a novice teacher and an expert teacher? How can teachers with different levels of experience learn from each other?

CHAPTER 1

# English Language Teaching in the "Post-Method" Era: Toward Better Diagnosis, Treatment, and Assessment

*H. Douglas Brown*

## INTRODUCTION

In the century spanning the mid-1880s to the mid-1980s, the language teaching profession was involved in what many pedagogical experts would call a search. That search was for a single, ideal method, generalizable across widely varying audiences, that would successfully teach students a foreign language in the classroom. Historical accounts of the profession tend, therefore, to describe a succession of methods, each of which is more or less discarded in due course as a new method takes its place. I will comment on "the changing winds and shifting sands" (Marckwardt, 1972, p. 5) of that history momentarily; but first, we should try to understand what we mean by *method.*

What is a method? More than three decades ago, Edward Anthony (1963) gave us a definition that has quite admirably withstood the test of time. His concept of method was the second of three hierarchical elements, namely, *approach*, *method*, and *technique*. An approach, according to Anthony, was a set of assumptions dealing with the nature of language, learning, and teaching. Method was defined as an overall plan for systematic presentation of language based on a selected approach. It followed that techniques were specific classroom activities consistent with a method, and therefore in harmony with an approach as well.

Some disagreement over Anthony's definition can occasionally be found in the literature. For Richards and Rodgers (1986), method was an umbrella term to capture redefined approaches, designs, and procedures. Similarly, Prabhu (1990) thought of method as both classroom activities and the theory that informs them. Despite these and a handful of other attempted redefinitions (see Pennycook, 1989), we still commonly refer to methods in terms of Anthony's earlier understanding. For most researchers and practicing teachers, a method is a set of theoretically unified classroom techniques thought to be generalizable across a wide variety of contexts and audiences. Thus, for example, we speak of the

Audiolingual Method, the Direct Method, and of the Silent Way or Suggestopedia, all as methods.

## METHODS: A CENTURY-OLD OBSESSION

Ironically, the whole concept of separate methods is no longer a central issue in language teaching practice (see Kumaravadivelu, 1994, among others). In fact, in the mid-1980s, H. H. Stern (1985, p. 251) lamented our "century-old obsession," our "prolonged preoccupation [with methods] that has been increasingly unproductive and misguided," as we vainly searched for the ultimate method that would serve as the final answer.

That search might be said to have begun around 1880 with François Gouin's publication of *The Art of Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages* (1880), in which his Series Method was advocated. This was followed at the turn of the century by the Direct Method of Charles Berlitz. The Audiolingual Method of the late 1940s and the so-called Cognitive-Code Learning Method of the early 1960s followed. Then, in a burst of innovation, the "spirited seventies," as I like to refer to them, brought us what David Nunan (1989) termed the "designer" methods: Community Language Learning, the Silent Way, Suggestopedia, Total Physical Response, and others. This latter flurry was not unlike an earlier period in the field of psychotherapy which burgeoned with a plethora of "methods" of therapy; some of the "designer" terms of that era were *T group*, *encounter group*, *analytical*, *Gestalt*, *marathon group*, *conjoint family*, *shock*, *client-centered*, and *narcosis therapy*, *electro-narcosis*, *biochemotherapy*, and *analytic psychobiology*!

Why are methods no longer the milestones of our language teaching journey through time? Our requiem for methods might list four possible causes of demise:

1. Methods are too prescriptive, assuming too much about a context before the context has even been identified. They are therefore overgeneralized in their potential application to practical situations.
2. Generally, methods are quite distinctive at the early, beginning stages of a language course and rather indistinguishable from each other at later stages. In the first few days of a Community Language Learning class, for example, the students witness a unique set of experiences in their small circles of translated language whispered in their ears. But, within a matter of weeks, such classrooms can look like any other learner-centered curriculum.
3. It was once thought that methods could be empirically tested by scientific quantification to determine which one is "best." We have now discovered that something as artful and intuitive as language pedagogy cannot ever be so clearly verified by empirical validation.
4. Methods are laden with what Pennycook (1989) referred to as "interested knowledge" – the quasi-political or mercenary agendas of their proponents. Recent work in the power and politics of English language teaching (see, especially, Pennycook, 1994; Tollefson, 1995; and Holliday, 1994) has demonstrated that methods, often the creations of the powerful "center," become vehicles of a "linguistic imperialism" (Phillipson, 1992) targeting the disempowered periphery.

David Nunan (1991, p. 228) summed it up nicely:

> It has been realised that there never was and probably never will be a method for all, and the focus in recent years has been on the development of

classroom tasks and activities which are consonant with what we know about second language acquisition, and which are also in keeping with the dynamics of the classroom itself.

## A Principled Approach

And so, as we lay to rest the methods that have become so familiar to us in recent decades, what assurance do we have today of the viability of our language teaching profession?

Through the 1970s and into the early 1980s, there was a good deal of hoopla about the "designer" methods. Even though they were not widely adopted standards of practice, they were nevertheless symbolic of a profession at least partially caught up in a mad scramble to invent a new method when the very concept of method was eroding under our feet. We did not need a new method. We needed, instead, to get on with the business of unifying our *approach*[1] to language teaching and of designing effective tasks and techniques informed by that approach.

By the end of the 1980s, such an approach was clearly becoming evident in teaching practices worldwide. We had learned some profound lessons from our past wanderings. We had learned to make enlightened choices of teaching practices that were solidly grounded in the best of what we knew about second language learning and teaching. We had amassed enough research on learning and teaching in a multiplicity of contexts that we were indeed formulating an integrated approach to language pedagogy. Of course, we had not attained a theoretical mountaintop by any means; much remained – and still remains – to be questioned and investigated.

It should be clear from the foregoing that, as "enlightened" teachers, we can think in terms of a number of possible methodological – or, shall we say, pedagogical – options at our disposal for tailoring classes to particular contexts. Our approach – or theory of language and language learning – therefore takes on great importance. One's approach to language teaching is the theoretical rationale that underlies everything that happens in the classroom. It is the cumulative body of knowledge and principles that enables teachers, as "technicians" in the classroom, to diagnose the needs of students, to treat students with successful pedagogical techniques, and to assess the outcome of those treatments.

An approach to language pedagogy is not just a set of static principles "set in stone." It is, in fact, a dynamic composite of energies within a teacher that changes (or should change, if one is a growing teacher) with continued experience in learning and teaching. There is far too much that we do not know collectively about this process, and there are far too many new research findings pouring in, to assume that a teacher can confidently assert that he or she knows everything that needs to be known about language and language learning.

One teacher's approach may, of course, differ on various issues from that of a colleague, or even of "experts" in the field, who differ among themselves. There are two reasons for variation at the approach level: (1) an approach is by definition dynamic and therefore subject to some "tinkering" as a result of one's observation and experience; and (2) research in second language acquisition and pedagogy almost always yields findings that are subject to interpretation rather than giving conclusive evidence.

The interaction between one's approach and classroom practice is the key to dynamic teaching. The best teachers are able to take calculated risks in the classroom: as new student needs are perceived, innovative pedagogical techniques are attempted, and the follow-up assessment yields an observed judgment on their effectiveness. Initial inspiration for such innovation comes from the approach level, but the feedback that teachers gather from actual implementation then reshapes and modifies their overall understanding of what learning and teaching are – which, in turn, may give rise to a new insight and more innovative possibilities, and the cycle continues.