
Book Review

**Teaching English to second language learners in academic contexts:
Reading, writing, listening, and speaking. New York: Routledge.**

*Newton, J., Ferris, D., Goh, C., Grabe, W., Stoller, F., &
Vandergrift, L. (2018).*

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Each of the authors of this book is widely considered an expert in his or her respective skill area, having written numerous books on researching and teaching that skill. The book was originally proposed by Larry Vandergrift, who saw the need for a single volume with the essential and up-to-date information on research and pedagogy required for any English for academic purposes (EAP) program.

There are three units, similar in structure, for each of the four skills. The first unit begins with an overview of key research findings related to that skill. The second moves on to how these findings affect curriculum decisions, outlining important guiding principles for organizing an EAP syllabus. After that, the book introduces specific pedagogical activities and options for instruction and assessment.

In addition to the four skill-focused sections, the book contains an introduction that sets the context with key assumptions, and a unit that summarizes the key themes that have emerged across all the four skills. The book opens with this statement: "Skills-based teaching is at the core of EAP instruction" (p. 1), and this volume contains a clear focus on developing EAP through a focus first and foremost

on individual skills.

In the final unit, various issues for skill integration are raised, including brief examples of how such integration looks in practice.

The first unit of the book describes the four overarching assumptions that the authors state are "fundamental for effective skills-based instruction in EAP contexts" (p. 2). They are summarized as follows:

1. Teachers need to make explicit effort to build student motivation to meet both short-term and long-term goals.
2. Opportunities for meaningful academic language use should be at the core of an EAP program.
3. Language knowledge (vocabulary and grammar) should be developed "alongside and through" skills development.
4. Metacognitive awareness and skills are integral to EAP success.

None of these assumptions is controversial. They assume that an EAP program will have goals designed to meet the individual goals of the students and that language will be taught through an integration of skills teaching, training, and fluency

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practice that also includes language knowledge and metacognitive skills development. The total lack of mention of specific standardized tests shows that the authors are taking a bigger picture view toward skills development.

They see it as occurring in tandem with broader academic development in a meaningful and interactive context. The development of cognitive abilities—both skill specific, and metacognitive—is really fundamental to the type of EAP education they seem to envision and in line with current thinking on language and learning. The authors no doubt are aware that in general, metacognition does not receive the attention it should, given that there is a closer correlation between school success and metacognition than school success and intelligence (De Bruyckere, 2018).

In the last unit of the volume, the authors attempt to pull together a description of best practices in EAP skill teaching, in what they call “a reflection on seven key themes” (p. 243). This unit touches on some of the key concepts in language education and how they should inform the teaching of specific skills in an EAP program. For administrators and course designers, these themes can serve to stimulate a debate on the organization of programs, courses, curriculums, and interventions.

The first theme is that the teaching of skills should be integrated. Although the volume separates the skills in four sections, the authors clearly and carefully state that skills development is best approached through integrated-skills activities and that this integrated skills development best reinforces the specific target language skills. In addition to being consistent with the multimodal theory of optimally effective language use (Kress, 2009), one important reason the authors give for why integrated learning so is so important is that in reality EAP students rarely make use of any single skill, at least not for long, and multiple skill use is

practically ubiquitous. EAP students “need to develop expertise in orchestrating skill use because this is a fundamental characteristic of academic study” (p. 244). What follows from this naturally is that curriculums should be organized around content (topics or themes) delivered in a variety of modes, and through tasks that require any combination of skills, interwoven with knowledge and strategy and metacognitive skill teaching and training. Students need to transition from “learning the language to using the language to learn” (p. 246). The authors also state that the focus on content furthermore helps with student motivation (because of the connection to real-world issues) and maintaining curricular coherence.

The second theme is that providing practice is “a key factor for building procedural and automatic language skills in the L2” (p. 246). The authors are aware that practice is often viewed with suspicion in the world of TESOL because of its connection to debunked behaviorist theories of learning. Yet work by DeKeyser (2015) on transfer in language teaching and Ericsson and Pool (2016) on deliberate practice in general education seem to have convinced them of its importance. In particular, they recommend that attention be given to facilitating lots of deliberate focused practice with expert guidance and feedback, which they claim “builds specific skills and supports accelerated learning” (p. 247). This is especially important as students cannot just be given extra assignments out of class for practice as they are unlikely to engage in the type of sufficient, appropriate, and effective deliberate practice needed to develop skills. This must be, initially at least, teacher led.

The third theme is that fluency development is identified as an instructional goal. Fluency practice can be quite skill-specific, particularly in regards to whether a skill is productive or receptive. Yet it is an important and often overlooked feature of skill training, especially when there are program time

constraints. The authors point out that fluency practice needs to be built into the curriculum, and that in general, it involves getting students to perform at an appropriate rate, with appropriate accuracy, and appropriate break points.

The authors point out the need for a socio-cultural approach to language learning that includes collaboration among learners in the fourth theme. Citing Killen (2016), they list up the many benefits for learners who engage in skill use in a collaborative group setting (including positive affective factors, more and better language use opportunities, and more and better scaffolding and feedback, among others). The authors recommend both group sharing and focused group production (of solutions, reports, or projects, for example). This allows for the meaningful use of skills in context. While the authors are careful to explain that managing collaborative and cooperative learning well is not always easy, they also state that collaboration itself is a key skill in any modern academic setting, one that it is worth training and encouraging learners to adopt.

The fifth theme is that students need to be taught and trained to be more strategic. The rationale for this is that in academic contexts, learners will be confronted with complex and difficult tasks, the likes of which they have not encountered before. Only through regular strategy instruction and training and opportunities for use can learners come to acquire a set of functional strategies, the metacognitive awareness to plan, monitor, and assess their usefulness, and the mindset that difficult problems can be overcome. According to the authors, this is an incremental process that takes considerable time.

The sixth theme involves the use of effective feedback. They make the distinction between “assessment of learning and assessment for learning” (p. 252), otherwise known as summative and formative assessment (William, 2011). Here the authors, in line with trends in general education,

espouse the necessity and benefits of formative assessment. This is especially true for productive skills, where development occurs on a trajectory that contains regular feedback loops of performance, assessment, adjustment, and improved performance. This increasingly accepted element of education (see De Bruyckere, 2018, for example) acknowledges the need for the regular provision of actionable feedback to drive the learning process, instead of just summative assessments at the end of a term or course. The authors show how this type of feedback is closely connected to other themes, particularly providing (deliberate) practice, facilitating collaborative learning, and developing strategic learners.

The final theme touches on the need to incorporate technology. The authors acknowledge that the most effective types and amounts of technology use for EAP are not yet established, but without doubt technology is being increasingly deployed in academic settings and learners need at a minimum to be exposed to some of it.

Many books for applied linguistics professionals and teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) professionals attempt to review research findings and then describe pedagogy that aligns with it. However, this book takes a slightly more structured approach with each of the four skills of reading, listening, writing, and speaking. This approach improves the ease with which the content can be applied in diverse settings where student numbers and class contact hours often force course designers to make hard decisions on limiting the number of targets and the time spent on each. These difficult decisions are made easier with the list of priorities spelled out in the units summarizing important guiding principles. Perhaps the most interesting feature of this book, however, is its scope. Typically, skill-focused books examine only one skill. This book, in contrast, features this three-step organization for all four skills in one volume. Unlike the authors’

individual skill focused books, the format and space limitations of the current volume have required them to be more succinct, and provide lists of theoretically-principled essentials that are easily read and easily referenced. The aim is clearly to furnish teachers and administrators—researchers will likely find the book too general—with an update of research findings, and what their significance is for curriculum organization and in-class activities, in order to make EAP teachers more effective practitioners.

Which brings me to my final observation. One important and unstated theme of this volume is that EAP programs and teachers may not be as effective as they could be. Each of the sections on the four skills makes note that too often teachers have students practice without focus, or test instead of teach. A theoretically-principled approach to teaching the four skills sees them as being comprised of sets of clearly identifiable subskills. Teachers can teach, train, and have students practice them for improvement. That is to say, these skills are teachable. A caveat to that, however, is that it is not always easy to do so. In any EAP program, teachers need to make regular decisions about when to focus closely on a certain skill or strategy, and when to let the content drive the lessons. As teachers also need to deal with the concepts and the language (especially the vocabulary) for each unit, this does not leave a lot of time to focus on a sub-skill, a skill, a strategy, or metacognitive development. This is really the delicate time management act that professionals face every course, unit, and lesson. Unfortunately, it is well beyond the scope of this volume, and guidelines provided cannot take into account each individual situation as the number of factors is just too large: the level and experiences of learners, the amount of time available, the expectations of stakeholders, etc. Any effective program will have to work that out on its own. The guidelines provided in this volume are useful, but

not sufficient and in the end each program will be unique in how it balances the knowledge/skill/strategy/metacognition mix to meet short and long-term goals. I must say, however, that this book made me think about EAP at universities in Japan and how the challenge is particularly difficult in an EFL context with few learners aiming to study abroad. Given the emphasis on standardized test results and the limited amount of time in such contexts, it is probably not so surprising to see educators sacrifice skills development for short-term gains. This would be especially likely to occur in cases where long-term goals are less clear or less valued, or in places where EAP skill instruction knowledge is limited.

That said, for professionals who are busy, or who would like a refresher on recent research and pedagogy, particularly for skills outside their recent experience sphere, this volume is a compact and readable resource that can at least get them acquainted with key pedagogy, practices, and issues.

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書 評

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要 旨

本書の特徴は、特定の言語技能や言語教育・習得全般に焦点を置く他の図書と異なり、アカデミック英語（EAP）プログラムが扱う4技能を網羅している点である。それぞれの章において、著者らは該当技能の調査・研究の動向、それらの研究がカリキュラム開発をどう裏づけるかを示している。また、具体的な言語活動や評定についても言及している。最終章では、前章までに明らかになった言語技能指導法の7つの包括的概念を解説している。基礎から実践に到るまで、EAPプログラムとしての英語指導の概観を丁寧に提供する本書は、言語教育に関わる読者にぜひお推めしたい一冊である。

キーワード

アカデミック英語プログラム、4技能教育

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