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ESL Teaching: Principles for Success

A Book Review by

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ESL Teaching: Principles for Success

Lee McCallum¹

Freeman, Y.S., Freeman, D.E., Soto, M., & Ebe, A. (2017). *ESL teaching: Principles for success*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

ESL Teaching: Principles for success was first published in 1998 and revised recently in 2016. This newly revised edition still contains the basic teaching principles and methods which underpin the original edition however the authors have included up to date ESL and language research to enhance the range of methods and principles available to teachers. The book primarily focuses on the teaching of languages (English) at primary mainstream and ESL level in the United States of America but many of the principles and activities are applicable to other teaching contexts. This focus is evident with references that support teaching at young learner level. The book contains an index, a summary of each chapter and thought provoking questions readers need to consider in the 'Application' section that concludes each chapter. The book supports the humanistic nature of teaching with stories from real teachers featuring throughout the book and the book's aim of being pedagogically useful shines thanks to this content.

The book consists of 280 pages with 8 chapters featuring different principles. These teaching principles include emphasis on making learning student centred (Chapter 1) as well as having a stronger emphasis than previously on academic language (Chapter 4), making communicative activities as close to meaningful and purposeful real-life language use (Chapter 5) as well as chapters that consider culture (Chapter 7) and assessment (Chapter 8).

Chapter 1 provides an overview of ESL methodology including the shift from the early influence of SLA theories in the 'grammar translation method' to the 'natural approach' which believes there is a natural acquisition order for language whereby some language features are acquired earlier than others.

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The chapter provides a useful summary table which highlights the beliefs and foci of each method. These methods are then contextualised for the teaching of bilingual students in the USA specifically by looking at bilingual research and how other methods can be used to support these students.

Chapter 2 provides several examples of student-centred activities for reading, writing, listening and speaking practice through different topics or themes. The chapter's focus then shifts to consider the types of students a class might contain from students with adequate schooling or students with little formal schooling as well as students with different nationalities and cultures. This chapter has a strong focus on engaging students by incorporating their lives, experiences and interests into lessons.

Chapter 3 focuses on linking whole lessons to parts or activities that make up the lesson as well as giving guidance on structuring curricula. The chapter highlights how different curricula influence English language learners including thematically organized curriculum where content areas can be interrelated and vocabulary is naturally repeated. The chapter shows through lesson plans and activities how to engage students through this approach.

Chapter 4 brings together the learning of content as well as the learning of the correct academic language used to express this content. Chapter 4 outlines how the teaching of academic language can be beneficial across subject areas and also considers assessment of this language in terms of state and U.S wide language and assessment policies as well as ESL specific policies from TESOL Inc.

Chapter 5 looks at creating engagement with students through real-life language use and activities that focus on learners using language through completing tasks. Chapter 5 outlines the following successful principles or characteristics that make activities and learning successful: Success, Curiosity, Originality, Relationships and Energy in that students must be able to achieve success (with the help of the teacher or peers) in activities. The activities must evoke curiosity and make students connect personally with the topics as well as allow them the opportunity to create original pieces of work, work with peers and build relationships and create energy. The theme of linking student experiences and interests to the classroom continues when the chapter considers ways to use texts to create engagement. The chapter demonstrates how this can be achieved with model texts, questions and teaching strategies that draw out language use.

Chapter 6 focuses on oral and written language with a focus on the input the teacher or the material presents, the output students produce and how this involves interaction. With respect to interaction, the chapter outlines how teachers can use different seating arrangements to achieve different interaction patterns with learners. The chapter then considers a genre approach to teaching academic language explaining how students can gain a better understanding of genres through group or pair interaction.

Chapter 7 reiterates the book's commitment to culture with activities that allow students to use their L1s when necessary. The chapter also challenges common misconceptions including that L2 immersion is the absolute only way to teach a language as well as learning best with a native speaker teacher. The chapter then explains how the best use of an L1 can be made with leading theories on bilingualism considered. The chapter concludes with some visual examples of students completing activities based on these principles.

Chapter 8 begins by highlighting the importance of connecting with students and showing faith in their abilities. Anecdotes from different teachers show how they used students' abilities in extracurricular activities and non-language hobbies to encourage them in their subject work. The chapter supports using formative class assessment as a way of continuously monitoring student improvement.

Overall, this book has some great engaging activities to use with students and these can be adapted to suit other ages and learners besides children. The book serves to remind teachers that their lessons need to be student-centred and fun for learners. The book would be a particularly useful resource for newly qualified ESL teachers or those who want to refresh their skills or acquire new activities and tasks.