



Reviewed work:

Teaching Reading to Adult Second Language Learners: Theoretical Foundations, Pedagogical Applications, and Current Issues. (2005). Meena Singhal. Lowell, MA: The Reading Matrix.

<http://www.readingmatrix.com/> Pp. 249. ISBN 0976396300. \$34.95

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Teaching Reading to Adult Second Language Learners: Theoretical Foundations, Pedagogical Applications, and Current Issues, by Meena Singhal, is a book that aims to help pre- and in-service ESL reading teachers as well as to serve as a textbook for those who are studying second language reading. The strength of this book is that the author has made an attempt to connect second language reading theories and actual practice in teaching. Singhal incorporates many of the hands-on skills that she has found useful in her experience of teaching ESL reading in various contexts. The book has ten chapters, each dealing with a specific topic, and three appendices. The chapters are self-contained so readers are free to choose those they need to use as a guide for specific teaching issues. Each chapter begins with a short abstract and ends with a summary. The discussion questions at the end of each chapter help readers deepen their understanding of what they read and encourage them to apply the concepts to their teaching or further research.

The first two chapters introduce the theoretical background and review the reading research that is relevant for teachers who engage in the teaching of ESL/EFL reading. Chapter 3 discusses how computer-assisted instruction can be usefully incorporated in reading instruction. Chapter 4 focuses on issues particularly pertaining to second language readers that emerge from the results of the research discussed in Chapter 2. The last six chapters deal with more practical information that teachers can use in their everyday teaching. These chapters include numerous examples of particular aspects of teaching, such as reading strategies, vocabulary building, how to design a course, and how to assess students' progress. Although there is some inconsistent use of terms across the chapters, that may prove somewhat confusing for those who are new to the field (e.g., formal schema, textual schema), readers should be able to figure them out from context. In short, this book is a good introduction to current theories of reading. It also provides practical tips for those who have had limited training in second language teaching and do not

know how to tackle the teaching of reading to adult second language readers, who may have sufficient literacy background in their first language but struggle to be good readers in their second language.

In the first chapter, Singhal reviews reading theories from a historical perspective. The three reading models presented – bottom-up, top-down, and interactive – and the teaching approaches that stem from them give readers a basic understanding of how reading has been theorized and how the emphasis on reading approaches has shifted over time. In the following chapter, "Prominent Areas of Research in L2 reading: Past, Present, and Future Directions", Singhal focuses on a selection of second language research topics: empirical studies on reading strategies and metacognitive awareness, schema-related research, and orthographic knowledge. While reviewing the results of second language reading research, Singhal discusses the importance of each area and suggests how teachers can help students by training them in specific areas or by simply being aware of the difficulties readers face. As Chapter 2 and Chapter 4, "Factors Influencing L2 Reading Development, Performance, and Comprehension", are tightly connected, readers who are not familiar with current reading research are recommended to read these two chapters together. She explains the terms more clearly in Chapter 4 (e.g., different types of schemata) and directs readers to refer to Chapter 2 for a more detailed analysis of the factors discussed. These two chapters prepare readers with theoretical background on specific skills that the author connects to the particular aspects of teaching discussed in later chapters.

In Chapter 3, "Computer-Assisted Instruction and Reading", Singhal introduces information about on-line resources and software that will help students develop their reading skills. She briefly discusses the advantages of computer-assisted reading lessons, saying that they allow students to receive individualized instruction, immediate feedback, opportunities to have their reading paced, and to have easy access to other resources available online. While she shows the potential of computer-assisted reading lessons, she also discusses how teachers can make the most of them by introducing materials cautiously and smoothly. She provides links to various web sites and the names of the software discussed. Appendix B also lists other web sites that have reading-related activities. This chapter shows the potential and wealth of computer-assisted reading materials available to teachers. One may want to read this chapter last, after going through the different teaching techniques discussed in Chapters 5 through 9. Doing so will give one sufficient knowledge of what Singhal considers good teaching, allowing one to then decide whether the computer-assisted materials introduced in this chapter will help develop students' specific reading-related skills and can be effectively incorporated in teaching.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 deal with how to teach specific aspects of reading. Chapter 5 mainly discusses examples of teaching argumentative academic text with an emphasis on strategy use. This chapter divides reading instruction into three phases — pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading — and shows what kind of strategies students need for each phase. Chapter 6 discusses the advantage of using literary texts in reading lessons and how to introduce them to students. Chapter 7 focuses on vocabulary building. The samples presented in the tables provide readers with valuable hands-on information on how to teach reading in each area. In some cases, the picture of a lesson would have been more complete if the actual text were provided, but knowing the kinds of questions and how they are asked in a lesson is helpful for designing one's own reading lessons.

Chapter 8 discusses how to assess students' reading performance. As "it is important for teachers to determine the purpose of the assessment and the specific types of knowledge to be assessed" (p. 191), Singhal introduces different assessment methods for different purposes. Some methods, such as multiple choice, recall, cloze text, or question and answers, are for measuring students' reading comprehension. Others, such as journals, reading logs, check lists, and portfolios, are for tracking students' reading behaviours and strategy use. She also touches on computer-based assessment. Additional evaluation tools that teachers can use in the classroom are introduced in Chapter 9, Table 6, "Methods of Evaluation for ESL Reading Course" (p. 202). Chapter 8 is useful because it introduces a variety of assessment methods teachers can use in reading classes. However, a discussion of the weaknesses of each method, as is provided for the multiple choice and cloze tests, would give teachers more information to help them decide which methods are most appropriate for their own classes. For example, many of the methods discussed in the chapter require students to write their answers in sentences or paragraphs. This may prove too great a burden for those who are good at comprehending but not at writing. Of course this problem is avoided "if multiple measures of the same skills are used" (p. 191) as she recommends, but then one has to consider time constraints.

Singhal recommends that teachers choose an assessment task that will allow students "to demonstrate their knowledge including the context, textual, and linguistic schemata of the text" (p. 191). This is an example of her emphasis on the top-down processes of reading throughout the book. Although the role of background knowledge in reading comprehension is recognized in the second language reading field, it is also true that recent studies criticize the over reliance on schema theory in explaining reading processes (e.g., Nassaji, 2002). In light of this, it may be wise to remind readers that the balanced approach discussed in the first chapter of this book, which suggests there should be an integration of the top-down processes with bottom-up processes, is necessary in second language reading instruction.

Chapter 9 presents a step-by-step guide on how to design a reading course. This chapter is particularly useful and I would recommend it as a guideline not only to those who have to develop their own reading courses but also to those who already have some experience in teaching. Pre-service teachers should appreciate the description of how to create a course outline, elements that they should include, and considerations they should give to each step. The same philosophy works for creating a lesson plan, so teachers can use this chapter as a good reference even when they are creating a lesson that is much smaller in scope than a whole course. Although very similar steps are taken for creating a lesson plan and for creating a course, it would be more useful for pre-service teachers to be presented with a sample lesson plan, as this seems to be where there is an immediate need among pre-service teachers.

In Chapter 10, Singhal urges reading teachers to keep an eye open for opportunities outside of the classroom for continuous professional development. Appendix A also presents some reading journals and organizations one can refer to in order to develop one's understanding of reading processes.

Teaching Reading to Adult Second Language Learners covers the basic areas necessary for one to start teaching reading. Singhal is correct in asserting that it is critical for teachers to have sufficient knowledge of what issues are problematic for second language readers, and how to

address these issues. Due to the receptive nature of reading, one does not know how others read simply by observing them. This book presents some aspects of reading that teachers should be aware of, and shows how the issues raised by research can be tied into actual teaching practices. It also provides references for further reading and teaching resources. In sum, this book can be used as an introduction for those who are interested in teaching reading, as it will help them start to understand the complexity of reading processes and how to help second language readers become more proficient.

Reference

Nassaji, H. (2002). Schema theory and knowledge-based processes in second language reading comprehension: A need for alternative perspectives. *Language Learning*, 52(2), 439-481.

About the Reviewer

Kumiko Inutsuka is a Ph.D. student at OISE, at the University of Toronto. Her interests are in second language reading research and pedagogy. She has taught English and Japanese in various contexts.