

Reviewed work:

Exploring Second Language Reading: Issues and Strategies. (1999). Neil Anderson. Boston: Heinle & Heinle. Pp. 129. ISBN: 083846685-0. \$20

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Exploring second language reading: issues and strategies by Neil Anderson is a volume in the teacher development series *Teachersource*, edited by Donald Freeman. Anderson outlines his approach to the theory and practice of teaching reading, developed through extensive experience of teaching and research in TESOL. He tells us that the volume is a reflection of his personal philosophy of second language reading, explains why he holds these beliefs, and how he has developed them. His aim is not to convince us of his philosophies and beliefs, but to have us to think about the process of developing our own beliefs, and to guide us through a process he uses himself.

Anderson uses the pedagogical framework that he developed to guide his own teaching development as the organizing principle for the book's contents. "This framework developed as I struggled as a teacher to develop my own voice from the pages of research and suggestions by others that I have read." (p. 4). He integrates theory and practice through eight teaching strategies for second language reading classes, and chooses the word ACTIVE as a mnemonic device for six of the strategies that he considers when teaching an ESL/ EFL reading class.

At the heart of Anderson's approach is his belief that "reading is an essential skill for English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) students; ... and the most important skill to master. With strengthened reading skills, ESL/EFL readers will make greater progress and attain greater development in all academic areas" (p. 2). This alerts us that the context for most of the discussion is in reading for academic purposes programs in university and secondary school education settings.

Anderson's views on reading processes and reading skills development suggest a psycholinguistic approach to the theory of reading. In this approach, reading is viewed as an active process in which the reader's knowledge, skills and experiences are activated to construct meanings in the text. (See Goodman, 1976 for a full explanation of psycholinguistic reading theory.)

The introductory chapter provides an overview of research into reading for second language learners and models of the reading process, with each of the eight following chapters devoted to one of the ACTIVE teaching strategies: **A**ctivate Background Knowledge; **C**ultivate

Vocabulary; Teach for Comprehension; Increase Reading Rate; Verify Reading Strategies, Evaluate Progress; Build Motivation and Select Appropriate Reading Materials.

The perspectives in these chapters are presented through dialogues between Anderson and his teacher colleagues about their experiences of teaching, with references to important research in the area. Following the discussion on research and practice are detailed descriptions of the lesson plans and teaching strategies Anderson has developed to put his beliefs into practice. Several chapters triggered my interest in exploring his strategies with learners I encounter in less academic settings. I especially appreciated Anderson's *Teach for Comprehension* chapter, particularly because he addresses a complex issue in a very straightforward and explicit manner. That is, the differences between *teaching* reading comprehension and *testing* reading comprehension. Here he points us towards a great collection of resources that includes experimental research, the literature on models of reading comprehension, and his own teaching strategies and teaching experiences. In **Frameworks** he demonstrates a wide range of checklists, reference guides, toolsets and guidelines for us to draw on when thinking about what comprehension means and how to teach these skills to second language learners.

As with other volumes in this series, the contents of each chapter are structured around three strands: **Teachers voices**, **Investigation** and **Frameworks**. Anderson frames each chapter with an introduction in which he tells anecdotes of personal life experiences that have influenced his thinking about teaching, learning and reading in a second language, and concluding remarks and suggestions for further reading.

Teachers Voices is the section where Anderson, his teacher-colleagues and their students explain their experiences, attitudes and beliefs about teaching reading to learners in academic focus programs.

Investigation alerts us to opportunities to explore our own beliefs through reflecting, experimenting, and exploring our own and learners' responses to the teaching strategies offered. Anderson claims that in **Frameworks**, he shares with us aspects of second language reading theory that have influenced his own teaching philosophies. I found these sections far more generous than he asserts. In each chapter's **Frameworks**, he outlines the theoretical underpinnings of the teaching strategy and its importance in a reading program for second language learners. To this he adds a treasure trove of teaching suggestions and activities for each of the recommended strategies. These are detailed guidelines for teaching sequences that scaffold learners' development of effective reading skills and strategies for academic purposes. The teaching strategies instruct learners quite explicitly on the purpose and value of the reading strategy or skill, support learners as they apply it, and help them to evaluate its effectiveness for themselves. Anderson's teacher-colleagues comment candidly on the effectiveness of these teaching strategies for their own learners.

The structure of the chapters is unusual in an academic publication, and works to the interests of the reader rather than to the conventions of publishing. Instead of applying a template of standardized headings and sections in each chapter, Anderson uses these in ways that support his pedagogic purpose. The **Teachers Voices**, **Investigations** and **Frameworks** strands appear in varying lengths and in different sequences in the chapters. Readers who expect to find chapters

presented in a regular fashion throughout the book may find this a little disconcerting. To my mind it presents the individuals' ideas in a more interesting and intuitive way than the traditionally linear sequence of conventional publishing.

Anderson's style of writing is conversational and generous. He shares anecdotes from his personal life and interests, and addresses the reader in the second person. For me, this tactic reduces a distance that I sometimes perceive in monographs where the reader is positioned as 'novice' and the writer as 'expert'. I appreciated Anderson's strategy of situating the reader as a colleague-in-TESOL with whom he shares the challenges of teaching reading to learners and the strategies he uses to explore them and apply and evaluate solutions.

I recommend this book as a guide for teachers exploring their own beliefs and practices; as a resource for teaching reading; and for the detailed discussion of research and practice in teaching reading. It is scholarly and inviting, and conveys a great respect for the power of teaching.

Reference

Goodman, K. S. (1976). Reading: A psycholinguistic guessing game. In H. Singer & R. B. Ruddell (Eds.), *Theoretical models and process of reading* (2nd ed.) (pp. 497-508). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.