# Book review

O'Neil, S. & Gish, A. (2008) *Teaching English as a Second Language.*
Oxford University Press: Sydney.

*Teaching English as a Second Language* by Shirley O'Neil and Annabelle Gish is a comprehensive, user-friendly practitioner handbook for the ESL/EFL profession. The authors cover a range of topics including theories of language acquisition, options for curriculum design and assessment, and strategies for creating a positive language learning environment. This content is supplemented by the inclusion of case studies, critical incidents, and reflection questions to stimulate engagement with the concepts and theories discussed.

A distinguishing feature of this text is the theme of language as sociocultural practice. This notion first appears in chapter one where O'Neil and Gish outline the various contexts in which English is taught in the global climate of the twenty-first century. The authors address the impact of culture on patterns of discourse organisation, attitudes to language learning, and variations in classroom communication styles.

In addition, chapter one includes an overview of Hofstede's cultural dimensions and a collection of case studies to stimulate critical reflection on the role of culture within the language teaching/learning process. Through a discussion of the oral language practices of Indigenous Australian cultures, the authors illustrate the need for teacher awareness of a wide range of linguistic practices. This is shown to be vital to understanding student approaches to language learning and to the incorporation of a range of linguistic approaches in the classroom. Throughout their text, O'Neil and Gish uphold the notion of additive bilingualism; that the learning of additional languages should complement rather than replace first language practices.

Chapters two and three examine the processes and stages of first and second language development and outline the major theories of first and second language acquisition. Further, the authors provide a broad overview of the relationship between language acquisition and cognitive development. The implications of these theories for teaching and learning remain a central consideration, with 'focus on pedagogy' sections providing tips for classroom practice.

In chapter four, the reader is provided with an historical overview of shifts in language teaching methodology, from grammar translation through to communicative competence. This is accompanied by an examination of the language education policies of government bodies around the world, placing the practice of English language teaching/learning within broader socio-cultural and political contexts.

In chapters five and six, O'Neil and Gish examine the various components of establishing a positive and challenging classroom environment. Among the major themes discussed is the importance of maintaining high expectations for all learners. Readers are encouraged

to consider the various covert and overt ways in which teacher expectations may be communicated to students, and the associated impact on learner outcomes. Focus on the ecology of the language classroom and the interrelationship of students and their learning environment continues the theme of language instruction as socio-cultural practice.

This focus on the learning community is extended in chapter seven where the authors turn their attention to ways of involving the broader community in the language learning process. Tips for encouraging volunteer presence in classrooms, along with ways to bridge the cultural and social gap between the home and school environments, are offered. This chapter also provides clear, constructive advice for teaching professionals to establish or extend their research profile in conjunction with their teaching practice. The provision of 'research snapshots' illustrate the manner in which research can complement overall program evaluation and can dovetail reflective teaching practices.

Chapters eight and nine focus on assessment and curriculum options. The authors provide clear information on a range of assessment related issues such as differences between testing and assessment, a description of the various types and uses of assessment, considerations regarding authenticity, and strategies for enhancing the validity and reliability of assessment instruments. Further, O'Neil and Gish recognise the growing need for mainstream classroom teachers to be aware of the cultural and linguistic demands embedded across a range of disciplines. Practical examples of classroom materials and activities for assisting teachers to identify and explicitly focus on these linguistic demands are particularly useful.

Overall, *Teaching English as a Second Language* by Shirley O'Neil and Annabelle Gish provides a well-balanced blend of theory and practice. The inclusion of case studies and classroom reflection questions render this text particularly useful for pre-service and in-service teacher training. Through their attention to the use of information communication technology (ICT) and other multimedia approaches to language instruction, and their emphasis on language teaching/learning as sociocultural practice, the authors have produced a text which is well-suited to the social and technological climate of the twenty-first century. This is a comprehensive guide to language teaching/learning that makes a significant contribution to practitioner handbooks for the ESL/EFL profession.

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