Reviewed work:

*Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language* (3rd ed.). (2005). Christine Nuttall. Oxford: MacMillan. Pp. 282. ISBN 1405080051. £12.50

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Notions of reading and the teaching of reading have been in constant revision, especially in recent years. Indeed, computers have led the general public to revise their own needs, skills, and reading strategies in their mother tongues and in foreign languages. The question is no longer whether students want to read more than speak but whether they need reading more. In 1999, as a teacher I administered a questionnaire to my university students about what skills they needed to learn in the foreign language classroom with the result that spoken language prevailed over written skills. However, students today may well consider the Internet as their most significant source of information not only in academic but also in daily life. Unfortunately, as I discuss later, the importance of information technologies and the reading skills required for them (Dreyer & Nel, 2003) is not an area that is especially addressed in this book.

This third edition of Christine Nuttall's popular book *Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language* may well be regarded as following a traditional approach. In the preface, the writer states that the content has three main parts: "the first presents the principles that underlie the way the book approaches reading, the second part looks more closely at some of the theoretical issues and how they affect reading teaching" (p. iv); finally, the last part deals with extensive reading and also includes a chapter on testing reading by Charles Alderson, who has acknowledged expertise in language, and particularly in reading and testing (see Alderson, 2000). *Teaching*

*Reading Skills in a Foreign Language* includes substantial theoretical material, but it is also easy to follow because the writer uses accessible language and from chapter 6 includes practical suggestions applicable in the classroom. A valuable asset of this book is a list of readings at the end of each chapter that enhances and gives extra support to the author's ideas. Exercises for checking readers' understanding of the theoretical concepts can be found at the end of the book.

The first part of the book includes issues such as the psycholinguistics of reading (mental schemata that influence reading, reading processing such as top-down or bottom-up processes in chapter 1), aspects of discourse (pragmatics, coherence and cohesion, text organization and rhetorical structure in chapter 2), and notions of classroom dynamics and teaching (including reasons and aims for reading programs, the role of teachers and learners, strategies that promote learning and materials in chapter 3).

The second part of the book addresses reading skills and strategies. Chapter 4 discusses how to achieve a more efficient reading through careful attention to the content, materials, and resources within the text. The author stresses the importance of careful planning and, especially, the physical layout and out-of-text prompts. The end of this chapter is devoted to increasing and refining reading speed. Chapters 5–7 deal with the difficulties arising from the comprehension of texts. These chapters begin with a short introduction that brings forward topics such as problems with understanding texts, teaching text attack skills, the problem of credibility, the integrated process (using a variety of strategies at any one time in the reading process), sources of exercises, suggestions on how to display a text for optimal reading, and advice in relation to the instructional language to be used.

Chapter 5 studies the problems related to vocabulary and how to liberate students from the anxiety created by some texts through reducing the use of dictionaries, encouraging them to ignore difficult words, analysing active and passive vocabulary, and suggesting comprehension strategies such as structural clues (grammatical functions, morphology recognition, inference from the context, and pre-approaching chunks with high lexical density). Chapter 6 works towards grasping the understanding and "sense" of the text through a bottom-up strategic approach. This chapter is very practical, and it offers many valuable suggestions and exercises to make students aware of syntactic, semantic, and morphological simplification strategies such as recognizing and interpreting cohesive devices, elliptical expressions, and discourse markers. Chapter 7 deals with the understanding of discourse, its functional value, rhetorical structure, text organization, presuppositions underlying the text, and making predictions.

The most practical part of the book, the third, is also the longest and has seven chapters. These chapters are mostly aimed at teachers and include exercises and drills. Chapter 8 presents the basics for reading programs (including foundations, material selection, motivation, physical organization of shelves and libraries, budgets, and other useful topics). Chapter 9 gets into preparing reading lessons. Chapter 10 deals with choosing appropriate materials and texts (readers may not want to miss the guidelines for choosing texts for classroom study, p. 179). Chapter 11, "Questioning," is an unusual and attractive chapter where Nuttall presents her approach to gathering the necessary information to understand readings. Chapter 12 addresses different types of texts, and chapter 13, by Alderson, considers the testing of reading. Finally, the very brief chapter 14 emphasizes the need for the teacher to continue as a reader and, whenever

possible, empathizes with the learners by getting used to reading in a second language as well as by reading from the students' library. The book includes three appendices. The first shows different kinds of readings; the second offers examples from reading lessons from reading courses; and the third provides developed lesson plans.

Overall, Nuttall presents an approach in which extensive reading seems to outweigh intensive reading. Of course, extensive reading has long been supported by studies in second language acquisition like Day and Bamford (2002), Greenberg, Rodrigo, Berry, Brinck and Joseph (2006), or Krashen (2005). Apart from the importance of extensive reading, Nuttall argues that teacher-directed facilitation of meaning (chapters 4–7), materials selection (chapter 10) and motivation (chapter 14) play a special role in reading programs. The author also gives explicit importance to testing reading, not only by including Alderson's chapter but also by arguing that testing is a way to balance and check the reading progress and to judge the appropriateness of reading programs, and a means to provide feedback. Although Nuttall seems to have excluded research after the 1990s (which I will discuss further below), she describes types of exercises and their foundations precisely and stresses the top-down and bottom-up strategic approaches.

Her approach to second language reading is disputable today. Computers have raised special interest in the means of learning. In addition, there is interest in constructivist approaches and in the nature of reading as a social process rather than only in the learner's internal processes, as is suggested throughout the book by the presentation of ideas on internal schemata and the notions of comprehension, intake, and acquisition (see pages 6, 9, 72, 116, 119, 152).

A noticeable omission, mentioned earlier, is the limited interest posed by Nuttall in the influence of computers in reading. For example, there is no discussion of whether reading strategies are somehow different between paper and screen, or between a book and a blog. The differences in strategy use is currently a significant factor that may change the methods and ways of approaching reading in the future (Calisir & Gurel, 2003; Wright, 1993). In fact, throughout the book the author devotes only about a half page (p. 60) to such issues, which she directs towards addressing teaching tools to increase reading speed through computer use. She warns readers that computer reading programs are expensive and very few students will have access to software specially designed for learning or improving their reading skills. This limited interest is also seen in the references she recommends for an introduction to computer-assisted language learning (CALL), which dates back to the 1980s. Rapid updates in computers, podcasts, and many other technological devices mean that such references are now outdated. The author could also be challenged in her claim that computer usage does not need to be specifically addressed because "most teachers still do not have access to them" (p. 43).

One thing that may surprise both researchers and teachers is that although this edition of the book is dated 2005, there is no reference to literature after 2000. This omission means that although teachers who do not work with technology or who have just began in the field may find the book a good introductory volume, it is clearly flawed in providing the most up-to-date ideas of current practices and language learning approaches. For example, little is said about the importance of dealing with different learning styles in the classroom to improve reading progress (Strong, Perini, Silver, & Tuculescu, 2002), and there is no special attention to the development of reading in early readers (Gersten & Geva, 2003), reading skills development in early primary

school (Routier, 2003), or to the opportunities provided by cooperative language learning on improving reading comprehension (e.g., by using the Jigsaw II reading method; Ghaith & El-Malak, 2004). The book also overlooks the distinction between students with different general or background knowledge that is crucial for focusing on general and specific understanding of advanced texts. This is now a key concept in reading development for adults and English for specific purposes (Chan, 2003).

In conclusion, while the first edition of this book (published in 1982) would have been a valuable tool for teachers of foreign language reading for its theoretical background and practical ideas, as Walker (1998) also suggests in a review for the *ELT Journal,* the third edition tends to neglect current trends in the teaching of reading as well as the need to update the references.

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