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In this two-volume text, Murray and Christison have produced a resource that is both comprehensive and detailed in its coverage of English language instruction. The volumes focus on a wide range of subjects from

learner challenges to language structure to lesson planning to assessment.

The text is interspersed with vignettes asking the reader to consider real-life situations and propose suggestions and responses. The authors have, quite helpfully, suggested resources including books, articles, and websites for further reading and study.

According to Murray and Christison, the book is directed toward pre-service teachers and new English language instructors. While it serves as a useful guide for those teachers entering the field of English language instruction, the text can easily serve as a refresher for practiced teachers.

Throughout the text, the authors discuss the English language learners’ experiences in multiple settings, not just one particular region or country. This gives the text a global and inclusive perspective that would not have been achieved if they had focused on a single area with distinct cultural and societal characteristics.

Volume I begins with a discussion of the influence of the language learner’s social and cultural identifications on language acquisition. The authors examine the idea that environment, interests, and interaction shape identity. Much of this initial text reports on new concepts and ideas in language learning that challenge accepted arguments of twenty to thirty years ago.

The next section focuses on language awareness and stresses the importance of pronunciation for second language speakers, particularly in academic settings. The authors present a rather extensive discussion of articulation and phonology with special attention given to suprasegmental features such as pitch, duration, and stress.

Murray and Christison continue with a discussion of learning theory, offering an interesting analysis of learning strategies in the classroom. They suggest approaches to accommodating students with diverse learning styles and stress the importance of varying classroom activities to reach different types of learners. According to the authors, the current trend toward cooperative learning is quite appropriate for the goals of the language learning
classroom. This interaction provides opportunities for input, natural talk, and immediate evaluation.

The text contains a fairly brief yet noteworthy section about professional development. The authors explain that difficulties in second language instruction arise because disciplinary knowledge is fragmented and standards of practice are widely varied. They provide a detailed framework for peer-coaching and other mentoring models with clear objectives for participants.

The second volume begins with an in-depth analysis of curriculum and compares various approaches to organizing curricula. It includes an interesting discussion of the importance of not only teaching language but also extending that instruction to allow for the development of communication skills and abilities. The authors offer suggestions for encouraging this focus such as organizing the classroom to foster interaction and selecting activities that emphasize collaboration and contact.

The text continues with an effective description of the various cohorts of English language learners along with appropriate expectations for their performance. The section focusing on teaching adolescent learners is particularly helpful as it suggests that instructors address the six key areas of adolescent development - intellectual, physical, social, emotional and psychological, and moral.

Interestingly, the authors have included a section on postsecondary adult learners, a group which does always get the attention that beginning and intermediate learners do. This segment of learners requires specific instruction in the academic literacies. The authors offer a variety of approaches to teaching writing skills to this group.

In their discussion of curriculum, Murray and Christison specifically address the planning process and types of content. They include a detailed lesson planning process and guidelines along with examples of lesson plans and comprehensive information about writing objectives for learning. The section on planning activities and managing classroom interaction might be the most valuable segment of the text for new and practicing teachers since it provides step-by-step information about the practical aspects of teaching English to non-native speakers.
Volume II concludes with a short discussion of program assessment and its importance for maintaining and improving English instruction and for meeting accreditation standards. The authors stress that assessment should be used throughout the learning process for a variety of purposes including screening, placement, and the monitoring of progress.

The authors also discuss the importance of teacher evaluation but emphasize that this evaluation should be separate from the program assessment process. The chapter focused on instructor self-evaluation will be of particular value to practicing teachers. In it, the authors introduce tools and practices for self-reflection and examination.

English language instruction for non-English speakers is complicated by a variety of social and cultural factors. These complexities tend to muddy the water in terms of establishing clear-cut guidelines for teaching students. Murray and Christison have done well to acknowledge and address these influences while providing practical guidance for instructors. Overall, this two-volume set offers a broad yet detailed survey of the field of English language instruction. It will undoubtedly serve as a useful resource for new English language teachers as well as seasoned instructors.

About the Reviewer

Catherine Tingelstad is a Reference Librarian at Pitt Community College Library in Greenville, NC. Catherine graduated with an English major from Duke University in 1988 and earned her Master’s in Library Science in 2010. Her areas of interest include education, language, and literature.