

# Book Review

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## Essentials for Successful English Language Teaching

Thomas S. C. Farrell and George M. Jacobs

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As Farrell and Jacobs (2020) have put it, the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach represents a paradigm shift for second language education. However, despite its popularity and importance, Farrell and Jacobs maintain that CLT is not interpreted or applied uniformly across teaching contexts. *Essentials for Successful English Language Teaching* offers second language teachers a comprehensive pedagogical framework which they can draw on to effectively implement the principles of CLT in the second language classroom. The book, now in its second edition, is divided into 11 chapters that explore eight interconnected strategies for successful second language education. The core chapters follow a consistent and clear structure which brings theory and practice together by discussing each of the eight essentials, presented as the titles of each chapter, in relation to how they may affect the roles, expectations, and experiences of teachers and students. Additionally, each essential is introduced to the reader through a resonating vignette—revised from the first edition—that reflects the latest insights concerning CLT methodology as well as teachers' everyday realities.

In Chapter 1, Farrell and Jacobs contextualize the eight essentials specifically within the CLT methodology. Farrell and Jacobs explain that CLT is often only partially adopted by second language teachers and that the (partial) application of CLT varies significantly across educational contexts. In response, the authors rightly construct a practical and *holistic* framework of CLT that helps equip teachers to not only effectively implement CLT itself, but also promote second language learning that is socially-oriented. Chapter 2 introduces the first essential: "Encourage Learner Autonomy." Through this essential, Farrell and Jacobs position the student as an active participant in curricular choices, while simultaneously as "responsible for their own learning" and the learning of their peers (p. 19). In this chapter, the authors clearly demonstrate the importance of an agency-informed view of the student and of a curriculum that reflects students' individual realities.

Chapter 3 expands on what seems to be the foundation for all essentials: "Emphasize the Social Nature of Learning." This fascinatingly detailed chapter is perhaps the most practical and practice-focused one from which teachers learn how to see students as a community rather than as "separate, decontextualized individuals" (p. 44). The authors offer a number

of individual roles which students can step into in order to collectively support group success.

Chapters 4 and 5 go hand-in-hand as both consider different but interrelated dimensions of learning. In “Develop Curricular Integration” (Chapter 4), Farrell and Jacobs argue that approaches such as language across the curriculum, language for specific purposes, and content-based instruction help promote an interdisciplinary model of pedagogy which weaves together students’ needs, skills, and interests. In “Focus on Meaning” (Chapter 5), the authors encourage teachers to prioritize meaning rather than accuracy. In other words, teachers should constructively interfere with their students’ learning only if “the meaning is being lost, obscured, or imperiled by students’ language errors” (p. 67).

Chapters 6 and 7 share the same focus. They seek to help teachers enhance second language teaching and learning with approaches that recognize students’ individually distinctive abilities. In “Celebrate Diversity” (Chapter 6), Farrell and Jacobs propose that each student is unique in his or her learning and communication styles, in addition to exhibiting an individual “intelligence.” Moreover, the authors discuss the need to learn about students’ multiple identities and to integrate them meaningfully into instruction. In “Expand Thinking Skills” (Chapter 7), the authors position students as members of society rather than simply as language learners. Accordingly, the authors offer a series of strategies for teachers to develop critical and creative thinking skills in individual students.

Chapters 8 and 9 may be linked together by the overarching theme of evaluation. The former chapter is about how teachers evaluate students’ work, while the latter is about how teachers evaluate their own roles. In “Utilize Alternative Assessment Methods” (Chapter 8), Farrell and Jacobs discuss alternative assessments, such as peer assessment, self-reports, and portfolios, and their potential to learning by replicating “real-life conditions where people struggle through process while arriving at product” (p. 120). In “Promote English Language Teachers as Co-learners” (Chapter 9), the authors provide teachers the tools to reconceptualize and maximize their roles as teachers. In this chapter, teachers are encouraged to see the multiple roles they play: researchers, learners, teachers, coaches, and mentors.

Chapter 10 is timely in light of the current global pandemic as instruction has largely moved to online delivery. In “Eight Essentials Facilitated with Technology and Cooperation,” Farrell and Jacobs briefly examine the potential of technological tools, such as email, blogs, podcasts, mobile applications, and social media platforms, among others, to promoting the eight essentials in the digital domain. The authors conclude the book with a chapter that revisits the key perspectives of CLT as well as the seminal strategies that support the effective implementation of the method.

*Essentials for Successful English Language Teaching* is an important book for novice and experienced second language teachers alike. With its

clear language and consistent layout, the book provides a systematic and accessible presentation of the foundations of CLT and addresses the need to develop standards for practice around CLT in second language education. This book is particularly useful for second language teacher candidates who wish to learn not only about CLT itself, but also the everyday realities of second language teaching: the complex yet rewarding experience of language teaching. Farrell and Jacobs effectively link theory to practice in a teacher-friendly and teacher-centred style. Although the authors call for a holistic understanding and implementation of CLT, much of how the eight essentials converge in practice is left for teachers to figure out as the authors discuss the eight essentials discretely and provide brief and generalized examples of how the essentials might interconnect in the last chapter. Overall, *Essentials for Successful English Language Teaching* proposes the kind of second language learning that recognizes students and teachers as complex, active, and agentive individuals and the second language classroom as an extension of an interconnected and fast-changing world.

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### *The Reviewer*

Vander Tavares holds a PhD in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics from York University in Toronto, Canada. He is currently a postdoctoral research fellow in the Faculty of Education at Høgskolen i Innlandet (Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences). His more recent work focuses on internationalization of higher education, the international student experience, second language acquisition and identity development.