INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON TEACHING THE FOUR SKILLS IN ELT

Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing

**Edited by Anne Burns
and Joseph Siegel**

International Perspectives on English Language Teaching

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International Perspectives on Teaching the Four Skills in ELT

Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing

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Introduction

The four language skills are at the heart of current practice in English language teaching. It is now usual in course books to find sections dedicated to listening, speaking, reading and writing alongside the more traditional activities of grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. This focus on skills is the result of a confluence of factors, including: communicative competence as the main aim of language teaching and learning; improved understandings of genres and their importance in social practice; and theoretical insights into how we listen, speak, read and write.

In spite of the focus on skills, research-based volumes that deal with all four are relatively rare. This volume not only extends our knowledge and understanding of skills teaching, but does so from a truly international perspective with chapters from 16 different countries. It is therefore a timely publication, as well as a very welcome addition to the *International Perspective on ELT* series.

There have been extensive discussions in the literature on integrated skills, but in their initial chapter, the editors make a strong case for treating each skill separately, based on practicality, accessibility and convenience for the reader. It is also true to say that individual skills are often emphasised even when doing mundane tasks and activities in daily life, such as watching TV or reading a book. In academic life, where many of these studies are situated, the focus on individual skills can be even greater and require special attention to ensure success. The organisation of the book by skill—listening, speaking, reading and writing—is therefore appropriate.

A real strength of this volume is not only its geographical diversity but the range of teaching and learning settings represented. These chapters address skills teaching across all educational levels, primary, secondary and tertiary, in both public and private sectors. There are diverse perspectives on a range of contexts, from English for Academic Purposes, adult migrant education and modern foreign language teaching to nurse education.

A number of the chapters present innovative ways of developing familiar aspects of skills teaching, including genre (Pang and Burri on discussions and Hayik on descriptive writing), process writing (Villas Boas), bottom-up listening skills (McAuliffe and Brooks) and using authentic texts (Vraštilová).

Others focus on teachers and their beliefs and practices. Santos and Graham compare listening practices across different contexts (UK and Brazil) while Renandya and Hu look at teachers' beliefs about the usefulness of different listening strategies. Tante examines the innovative approaches to teaching speaking of primary school teachers in Cameroon, while Roach gives an account of his social practice approach to reading.

Two chapters give accounts of investigations into the effectiveness of skills instruction. In a nurse education context, Tweedie and Johnson show listening is a more important skill than either students or teachers believe and provide recommendations to improve instruction. Kozar focuses on learner satisfaction in Skype lessons in order to develop recommendations for effective speaking instruction.

There is also a series of chapters that links skills teaching to other aspects of language learner development. Thus, both West's and Pham and Iwashita's chapters focus on developing learner autonomy through reading and writing, respectively, while Lam encourages self-reflection through writing. Both speaking (Chappell) and reading (Murtiningsih and Hapsari) are used to develop students' criticality and critical thinking.

Drawing on their extensive experience and their international standing, Anne Burns and Joseph Siegel have brought together scholars and practitioners with a wide range of perspectives. Their insightful commentaries that open and conclude the volume and their selection of authors and chapters greatly enhance our understanding of skills learning and teaching globally.

Sue Garton
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Teaching the Four Language Skills: Themes and Issues

Anne Burns and Joseph Siegel

Introduction

This introductory discussion prefaces the chapters in this volume by survey-ing some key theoretical and practical insights into the teaching of the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, a sequence that we choose deliberately in this book for its well-recognised reflection of how language acquisition takes place in the 'real world' of naturalistic communi-cation. Our aim is not to provide a comprehensive review of the literature but to reflect some of the current strands of theoretical thinking about the topic of this book, and to complement these ideas with what can be gleaned about how skills are taught in different language programmes and contexts from the contributions of the various authors.

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Fundamental Considerations

Most English language teachers around the world, and readers of this book, will immediately recognise the widely used concept of the four 'macro' skills in language teaching. This concept has stood the test of time, not only as a way of categorising and conceptualising these 'core' areas of communication, but also frequently as a way of labelling and naming how language teaching is programmed and assessed in innumerable institutional contexts. Readers are likely to be very familiar with labels such as 'conversation', 'academic writing', 'reading comprehension' or 'listening skills' to describe classes and courses that segregate and focus on a particular language skill area. Moreover, language is often assessed on an individual skills basis, as in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) Speaking or Listening Tests, or in standards frameworks such as the increasingly internationally adopted Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), which may also often underpin decisions to teach skills in separate classes. In the field of language teaching research, too, there are innumerable theoretical and practical publications focusing on one or other of the four skills, and we ourselves as editors of this volume are 'guilty' of adopting this singular stance in our own work (e.g. Goh and Burns 2012; Siegel 2015).

It needs, of course, to be recognised that much recent thinking contests the idea of the separation and segregation of the four language skills, on the self-evident basis that communication simply does not occur in this way in the real world. One has only to consider daily tasks, such as conducting a transaction at a bank, going to a movie, interacting with friends or colleagues or using social media where listening, speaking, reading and writing skills are intimately connected and dynamically employed, to know that the divisions are artificial.

One well-known move away from this segregation into separate skills in the field of language teaching is the widespread idea that, collectively, listening and reading may be described as 'receptive' skills (those to do with receiving communication), while speaking and writing are often explained as 'productive' skills (those to do with producing communication) (e.g. Harmer 2015; Scrivener 2012). Another is the idea that listening–speaking, and reading–writing, are 'reciprocal' skills (e.g. Nation 2009; Nation and Newton 2009) that interact in actual use, and therefore should be considered as complementary and interconnected in second language teaching (e.g. Grabe and Zhang 2013; Hirvela 2013; Newton 2016; Rost 2001). While in the past listening and reading were sometimes described as 'passive skills' and speaking and writing as 'active skills', it is now more widely recognised that all language skills are 'active', in the sense that they require different types of cognitive and social processes, that are used in different ways (Richards and Burns 2012).

However, even more significant than these various perspectives, is the view that the teaching of listening, speaking, reading and writing should be 'integrated' (e.g. Hinkel 2006, 2010). This idea is not particularly new, even though it may still seem quite revolutionary in some quarters of language teaching (Nation and Newton 2009). As far back as 1978, drawing on a discourse-based perspective on language and communication, Widdowson argued for the integration of skills teaching, particularly in the case of English for specific purposes. This view was preceded by the 'situational approach' that had characterised earlier teaching principles between the 1950s and 1970s, that had recommended that, although the emphasis should be on speaking, all four skills should be taught (Hinkel 2010).

The situational approach highlighted real world contexts, such as 'at the post office' or 'at the restaurant', where functional language for particular purposes could be identified and taught. This approach was accompanied by the 'PPP', or presentation–practice–production teaching method, which is still alive and well today in many classrooms worldwide. The emergence of communicative language teaching from the late 1970s changed the predominant focus on language learned as form followed by function to one where meaning and use should be the main drivers for new learning that could be transferred to the world beyond the classroom. It set the scene for a challenge to the concept of isolated language skills teaching, with its emphasis on pattern drills from the lens of native speaker norms that still survives to this day. A more recent manifestation of methodological arguments for integrating skills and seeking meaningful production of language is the move towards task-based teaching and learning (e.g. Ellis 2003; Nunan 1989; Willis 1996). Rost and Wilson (2013) note both advantages and disadvantages of integration. One advantage is that it allows different skills to interact to strengthen language acquisition, and meet students' own learning styles and preferences. Another is that it creates variety and relieves the concentration required to focus on only one skill. On the other hand, non-integration can provide intensity and greater depth of learning, as well as allow for focusing on a skill where learners may have a weakness and need more concentrated attention to areas such as grammar, vocabulary, accuracy or fluency (see Hinkel 2010).

Nonetheless, as we noted earlier, the categorisation of the core language skills into four major areas persists, and is likely to continue. It is for reasons of convenience, not to mention accessibility and practicality, that we therefore conceptualised the various sections and chapters in this book in relation to these four skills areas. Our assumption in doing so is that many readers will want to dip into examples and illustrations of practice for a particular skill that they may be able to adapt to their own teaching

contexts. Readers will notice, however, as they progress through the book that many of the authors also refer to the importance of integrating other skills, even as they focus on one in particular, and they often provide illustrations of how the innovations they describe integrated in actual practice with more than one skill. Our own position in this debate is that, while not denying the importance of integrating skills, it is valuable to pay detailed attention to practices that carefully and thoughtfully promote the learning of one particular skill.

Skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing

Considerable advances have been made in understanding the knowledge, skills, strategies, products and processes that are characteristic of the different skill areas. Here, we have scope to touch only very briefly on some of the main findings and practical implications for each, as a backdrop for the chapters that follow.

Listening

The importance of paying systematic attention to listening development, in comparison with reading and writing, 'or even speaking', has often been overlooked in language teaching and in instructional materials (Vandergrift and Goh 2012: 4), as it may be assumed that if learners 'listen a lot' they will learn by osmosis (Cauldwell 2013; Richards and Burns 2012). Attention needs to be paid to both top-down and bottom-up listening speech perception processes (Newton 2009), although Lynch and Mendelsohn argue that 'if…top-down listening is important, bottom-up listening is indispensable' (2010: 184), and note that attention to the need for bottom-up listening has increased in recent years. Top-down processes refer to global or contextual knowledge and to previous experiences that enable a listener to infer the overall messages and meanings of incoming speech, as well as familiarity with the way language is structured in different genres of discourse. Bottom-up processes, on the other hand, relate to how a listener makes sense of the continuous stream of connected speech, including sounds, word boundaries, linked elements, reduced forms and prosody, or patterns of stress and intonation (Field 2008; Lynch and Mendelsohn 2010; Rost 2001).

Newton (2016: 431) reminds readers that 'skilled listening is of course, more than successfully segmenting the speech stream'. He cites Vandergrift

(2007: 193) who notes that learning to listen in another language involves 'the skillful orchestration of metacognitive and cognitive strategies'. Indeed, over the last two decades more attention has been paid to the development of metacognitive and cognitive strategies (Vandergrift and Goh 2012). Metacognitive strategies involve thinking about how to manage the processes and skills of listening through planning, monitoring comprehension, paying focused and selective attention to certain language features, and evaluating and checking interpretations, while cognitive strategies are directed towards thinking that involves predicting and inferencing, contextualising and elaborating, translating, transferring and summarising.

Field (2008) critiques what he sees as a pervasive 'comprehension approach' to teaching listening, whereby learners are required to identify the 'correct' answers to comprehension questions. This approach is likened to testing listening rather than teaching listening as it requires learners to focus on memorising rather than interpreting and responding to incoming information. He recommends a 'diagnostic approach' which involves pre-listening, listening, and then post-listening where intensive micro-listening activities focused on bottom-up processing are introduced to bridge gaps in learners' understanding of the information they hear (see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X41JsxPFIds for an example of how an Australian teacher used this approach in the classroom). Teaching should also focus on different types of listening where learners are able to be both listener and participant (Lynch and Mendelsohn 2010; Richards and Burns 2012; Rost and Wilson 2013). In one-way listening, such as monologues or movies, the listener has a 'transactional' or transfer-of-information role that is non-reciprocal. Two- (or more) way listening is where the listener occupies an 'interactional' role and is involved in an exchange-of-information where listening and speaking are reciprocal. Moreover, listening classes should involve both pedagogic (e.g. dictation, comprehension responses, dictogloss) and authentic (e.g. interviewing, improvising, extensive listening) tasks as well as a range of different types of 'listenings', cross-cultural, social, affective, contextualised, strategic, intertextual and critical (Flowerdew and Miller 2005).

Speaking

Speaking is a highly complex interactive skill that has the added complexity of being very anxiety-provoking for learners of another language (Woodrow 2006). Thornbury (2012) points out that there is the very obvious gap for L2 learners of limited knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and phonology. In addition, speaking is highly dynamic as learners must be able to produce

language 'on the fly' without the benefit of the planning and reflection associated with other skills, particularly reading and writing. In addition to learning the linguistic features of the language, speakers must manage a combination of accuracy, fluency and complexity so that they can meet the heavy processing demands of spontaneous talk. Goh and Burns (2012: 67) argue that speaking is a 'combinatorial language skill'. To develop speaking competence, learners must acquire knowledge of the language systems and the genres of discourse, the core skills of speech production and communication strategies that enable them to manage and negotiate rapid communication (see Thornbury 2012 for a similar overview of essential components of speaking).

Knowledge of the language systems includes knowing the sounds and intonation patterns that allow for intelligible exchanges between speaker and listener, the vocabulary (individual and multiple word units and lexical chunks) that carry the content of the message and the grammatical structures that bind utterances together (Burns and Seidlhofer 2010). In addition, speakers must recognise culturally and socially patterned streams of discourse that help them to anticipate the kinds of speech events they are dealing with so as to create meaningful exchanges with others. They also need to know how to use speech pragmatically and interculturally so that they can respond in appropriate ways and engage effectively in encounters with speakers across different cultures, knowledge that has become increasingly important in an interconnected and globalised world where English is a lingua franca (Seidlhofer 2011). Competent speakers also need skills in producing fluent speech, which relates to speech rate, numbers of pauses between syllables and utterances and articulation, as well as speech that is sufficiently accurate for comprehensibility and intelligibility. Moreover, speakers have to manage rapidly constructed interactive speech, through knowing, for example, when to take turns, how to build on previous utterances, how to ask for clarification and how to repair breakdowns in communication. Finally, speakers must use communicative strategies to keep the flow of speech moving and to compensate for gaps in linguistic knowledge or communicative skills. Speakers may use strategies such as finding other ways to express meaning (circumlocution), paraphrasing or avoiding some communicative messages altogether.

Thornbury (2012) notes that approaches to speaking instruction are often eclectic, using for example combinations of drills, information gap activities and informal discussions, or role plays. However, he recommends a more systematic three-tier approach to speaking instruction, that combines cognitive-skill learning theory and sociocultural theory, consisting of

awareness-raising (alerting learners to features of speech), appropriation (rehearsing and practising targeted features) and autonomy (performing different types of spoken genres). Goh and Burns (2012) also recommend a systematic 'holistic' approach that they call the teaching–speaking cycle, consisting of seven steps: focusing attention on speaking, providing guided input and planning, conducting speaking tasks, focusing on discourse, skills and strategies, repeating speaking tasks, encouraging reflection on performance and facilitating feedback on learning.

Reading

Reading is generally viewed as *the* foundational skill for success in academic learning (e.g. Carrell and Grabe 2010; Janzen 2007), as suggested in the distinction that is sometimes made between 'learning to read' and 'reading to learn'. Learning to read involves mastery of both bottom-up and top-down skills. Freebody and Luke (2003) argue that in the process of developing these skills learners need to adopt four 'reader roles', enabling them to move towards becoming fully competent and skilled readers. The first two roles, which denote the bottom-up and top-down skills, respectively, are 'code breaker' (decoding letter symbols and graphics), and 'text participant' (using background and personal experiences to bring meaning to the text). However, recent advances in research have recognised that reading is both a cognitive (bottom-up/top-down) and a sociocultural process. In relation to the latter, Freebody and Luke (2003) add two more reader roles: 'text user' (being aware of the text's cultural and social purpose and how to make use of the text), and 'text analyst' (being able to think critically about the messages in the text, to identify underlying ideologies or biases and to develop one's own interpretations).

Reading is not necessarily improved simply by reading more text. As for other skills, readers benefit from developing metacognitive (planning how to approach a reading text, estimating what one already knows about the content, monitoring comprehension and evaluating progress towards understanding) and cognitive (skimming, scanning, reading for gist) strategies. In the classroom, teachers can focus explicitly on the use of such strategies to give students confidence in reading and to assist them to increase their use over time.

Recent approaches to reading development have also highlighted the importance of distinguishing whether L2 readers have a language problem or a reading problem. Language problems in reading can be supported by assisting learners to develop a wide vocabulary (Nation 2006, 2015),

including the strategic use of dictionaries where necessary (Grabe and Stoller 1997). Reading development can be greatly improved through intensive reading, where learners have a specific learning goal in mind and focus on the skills to develop it (e.g. summarising meaning) and extensive reading (Day 2015) which also assists 'reading to learn', where learners select texts for their own enjoyment and read as widely as possible both within and outside class. Day (2015) notes that there is an increasing interest in reading pedagogy in using a combination of intensive and extensive reading as a blended approach. Teachers also need to consider using fluency activities, which are as important in reading as in speaking, in order to strengthen vocabulary development, reading rate and general language acquisition. Teacher modelling and reading aloud, repeated reading, choral reading, partner reading and readers' theatre where students perform a play by reading scripts are all activities that can promote reading fluency.

Writing

Writing, like reading, is fundamental for academic success. Being able to write involves a complex mixture of linguistic and textual knowledge as well as strategic knowledge and sociocultural awareness. In relation to linguistic knowledge, one of the main problems for many writers, both in first and second language writing, is knowing how to shift their writing from the forms of language that are used in speaking to the more formal requirements of the written medium. Writing is not simply a matter of speech written down, as research over the last two decades has clearly highlighted (Biber et al. 1999; McCarthy and Carter 1994). This research draws attention to variations in register across speech and writing and shows how they have different ways of structuring information flow and rhetorical and syntactic features, and of drawing on the grammatical and lexical systems (see also Thornbury 2012). A useful concept for conceptualising the shifts that occur across spoken and written language is 'the mode continuum' (Derewianka 2014), which shows how language use in different spoken and written contexts affects language form (Burns 2016). Teachers can use the concept of the mode continuum to scaffold their learners' writing towards more formal written discourse, and to teach learners the importance of features such as internal reference, and nominalisation in writing. Understanding the 'macro' features of written discourse is also vital to successful writing and research in genre theory (Hammond and Derewianka 2001) which has contributed to understanding of how different kinds of fictional (e.g. narrative, dramatic script, poetry) and non-fictional

(e.g. expository essay, discussion, recount) texts are constructed rhetorically. Knowing the schematic structure of the genres they are creating can help learners manage the flow of argumentation across the whole text.

Linguistic and genre knowledge are directed at the products of writing. Research, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, that investigated writers' composing techniques and strategies highlighted the cognitive processes that successful writers use to create texts, such as planning, reviewing, revising, rereading and editing. This research led to widespread adoption of the pedagogical approach known as 'process writing', which focused more attention on learners' self-discovery of fluency and creativity as developed through several drafts of writing and conferencing with teachers and peers to receive feedback. One consequence of this approach was that teaching did not always focus sufficiently on the quality of the written product as it 'neglected accuracy in favour of fluency' and created a 'false dichotomy' between process and product teaching (Reid 2001: 29).

However, simply equipping learners with the discourse knowledge and strategies used by good L1 writers may not in itself sufficiently enhance writing. Learners also need sociocultural knowledge to understand how writers take into account social factors, such as topic, audience, purpose and cultural norms. Studies in contrastive, or 'intercultural', rhetoric have raised awareness that it cannot be assumed that L2 patterns of discourse and argumentation will be transferred from L1 (e.g. Connor 2004). Teachers may need to spend time exploring different cultural beliefs and assumptions, and using techniques such as modelling texts, providing explicit practice in presenting arguments for a particular audience or highlighting differences in rhetorical expectations.

An area that has recently received increased attention in writing research is error correction (e.g. Ferris 2002). Correction can come from teachers, peers or through self-evaluation and can focus on global or specific errors through direct or indirect feedback (Ellis 2009 provides an extensive discussion of forms of feedback). Learners can also be asked to specify what forms of correction they would prefer (Lee 2005).

Skills Teaching, International Perspectives and Innovation

As we have already suggested, the teaching of the macro skills of language across the world is pervasive and permeates virtually every type of English language programme offered internationally (Hinkel 2010). One of our purposes in this book is to illustrate this diversity. Readers will notice that the

contributions range across all sectors of education from elementary to tertiary and include courses targeted at general skills development in English as well as those for specific, academic or vocational purposes. In addition, the authors originate from every continent, thus providing a broad picture of current concerns and creative practices in teaching the four skills.

While the focus of the chapters is on practice and ideas for practice, we were also seeking to show how practice was embedded in research (and particularly in local practitioner research). Thus, another intention of the collection is to indicate how global theoretical ideas might be localised for experimentation through situated research that seeks to meet the demands of particular teaching contexts. Contributors to this book were also asked to submit examples of their work that could be considered innovative or had implications for innovation in their particular teaching contexts. In respect of these various underpinnings for the book, a number of themes can be drawn out as illustrated in the chapters that follow. We focus in particular on five areas that seem particularly salient to us as editors.

Bottom-up Processes and Metacognition Need to Be More Widely Addressed in Skills Teaching

Many of the chapters in the book highlight the importance of paying greater attention in the teaching of the four skills to explicit instruction in bottom-up processes as well as metacognitive strategies. Santos and Graham (Chap. 2 on listening) note the lack of attention to metacognition highlighted in their data from secondary school teachers in England and Brazil. They recommend that teachers learn more about and teach the interactional features of listening, rather than focusing on listening comprehension, and in the process enhance learners' metacognitive strategies for listening. A further recommendation is that teachers evaluate the materials they are using to judge their effectiveness in developing these areas. McAuliffe and Brooks (Chap. 3 on listening), working with undergraduates in Japan, reviewed the traditional and mainly 'top-down' comprehension-oriented approach used in their previous courses using principles that adopted much greater attention to decoding sounds and developing strategies for listening. Pang and Burri (Chap. 8 on speaking) draw attention to both areas in their discussion of their use of Edward de Bono's framework of the 'six thinking hats' for international students preparing for entry to a tertiary institution in Canada. They argue that their approach equips

learners with structured and supported ways to develop these two important skills areas.

The Extent to Which Skills Teaching Is Effective Is Mediated by Teachers' Beliefs, Experiences and Professional Opportunities

Several of the chapters highlight the (positive and negative) impact that teachers' experiences and beliefs about teaching a particular skill have on their practices. Three chapters in particular, Santos and Graham (Chap. 2 on listening) Renandya and Hu (Chap. 3 on listening) and Tante (Chap. 6 on speaking) illuminate this issue by showing what was learned from research conducted with teachers, in classrooms in England and Brazil, China and Cameroon respectively. While acknowledging the inevitable impact of local political, educational and institutional priorities and constraints, they all argue for more constructive and continuing professional development for teachers. Such initiatives should expose teachers to recent theory and research so that they can become more skilled at drawing their practices from what is currently known about developing the language skills, using knowledge about both process and product, as well as metacognitive strategies. In this way, pedagogy would become much more than simply covering the ground of the syllabus. Three chapters by West (Chap. 12 on reading), Pham and Iwashita (Chap. 15 on writing) and Lam (Chap. 16 on writing) go further by raising awareness of teachers' responsibility to deepen their understanding of learning theory so that they are in a position to encourage and support autonomous and self-reflective forms of language development. In this way, learning and teaching can become more balanced and learner-oriented and more effective in meeting students' individual needs.

Innovative Teaching of Language Skills Is Contextually Based and Locally Interpreted

Innovation is often considered to mean introducing a completely new and startlingly different idea or behaviour—one that has never been used before. The chapters in this volume show that innovation in teaching language skills is relative: what is new in one context may not be so new in another, and 'newness' is related to how much something is current or familiar in a particular school or classroom. Some chapters in this volume do indeed introduce

ideas that have yet to gain wider currency in the language teaching field. For example, Chappell (Chap. 7 on speaking) outlines his concept of 'inquiry dialogue', where teacher talk is directed towards encouraging students to think, inquire and interpret. Chappell's approach, developed in Australia, could be applied to the teaching of all skills and not just speaking. Kozar (Chap. 9 on speaking) introduces the idea of teaching conversational English via Skype, which was used in an online course for adult learners in Russia, while Tweedie and Johnson (Chap. 5 on listening) in Qatar address intelligibility in teaching vocational English as a lingua franca, where the consequences of miscommunication may be life-threatening. All three present ideas for pedagogy that may be unfamiliar or outside the experience of many teachers.

Others, however, refer to pedagogical practices that are already well known in the field and have been familiar in some classrooms for many years. For instance, Tante (Chap. 6 on speaking) discusses how some primary school teachers in Cameroon, who had little opportunity for professional development and worked within a prescriptive curriculum, used activities well known in communicative language teaching. Yet in their context, these were creative and learner-centred attempts to involve their students in more constructive learning. Similarly, Murtiningsih and Hapsari (Chap. 11 on reading) moved beyond the traditional reading comprehension approach used in their context in Indonesia to encourage their students to engage more critically in reading, and at the same time to improve their language skills. Meanwhile, Pham and Iwashita (Chap. 15 on writing) introduced their Vietnamese students to indirect corrective feedback to encourage self-correction and greater learner autonomy. The use of authentic children's literature in elementary classrooms is also not new, but was not a familiar practice in Vraštilová's context of the Czech Republic. In Chap. 10, she shows how she introduced the teachers she was training to creative ways to integrate children's literature in the language classroom.

Local Innovations in Skills Teaching Involve Creativity

Innovative teaching occurs, not because the approaches are new, but because teachers and teacher educators have the courage and persistence to think creatively and to initiate or extend teaching strategies that are 'outside the box' in their context (see Jones and Richards 2015; Maley and Peachey 2015 on creativity in language teaching). One example is Lam (Chap. 16 on writing) who offers a creative angle on portfolio assessment, what he calls the 'showcase portfolio approach', which was introduced through practitioner research he supported in Hong Kong in a high school environment where the focus

on writing skills was highly product-oriented and test-driven. Villas Boas (Chap. 17 on writing) shows how, over the years, an institution in Brazil, which catered for learners of various age groups, worked creatively to respond to new theoretical developments in teaching writing, but in a way that was finely tuned to local philosophies and needs. In doing so, they also saw a need to take a wider 'skills-integrated' perspective on the development of writing programmes. All of these authors give a new and creative twist to theoretical ideas about skills teaching that may have been in circulation for some time; what is different is that they experiment with how they can be applied in new ways in their context.

The Teaching of Language Skills Needs to Be Embedded in Sociocultural Practices

Several chapters illustrate that the teaching of a particular language skill is not a 'technical' matter of focusing only on knowledge, skills and cognitive process. Learning and using English is a political, cultural and social process in which learners' needs for these skills are underpinned by how they provide affordances and opportunities now and into the future. The chapter by West (Chap. 12 on reading) is one example. West took a 'community-building' perspective to go beyond an individualistic and cognitive approach to developing a particular skill. The activities he developed for reading skills enhancement in a Hawai'ian academic English classroom introduced his students to critical and dialogic reading approaches as well as to social perspectives on learning autonomy. Roach (Chap. 13 on reading), teaching adult immigrants in New Zealand, also emphasises that reading is not just a skill to be taught in class, but is urgently needed in his learners' daily lives and for their successful integration into their new society. He shows the importance of the sociocultural notion of talk around text in promoting their ability to read more effectively. Hayik (Chap. 14 on writing), taking a somewhat different perspective on sociocultural practice, notes that learners need to be prepared for 'an interconnected world'. Her teaching of first year college Arabic-speaking students in Israel led her to seek literature that was culturally and socially relevant to them and could provide motivation as well as models to enhance their descriptive writing. These sources for her students' writing took her well beyond the traditional practice of relying on course books in her context.

Structure of the Book

As readers will now be aware, this volume provides a collection of international illustrations of each of the four core language skills. So that readers can easily access the contributions on these skills, the book is divided into four sections that focus on one particular skill, each of which consists of four chapters. In this introductory chapter, we have aimed to draw attention to some of the ways that the four skills have been perceived and categorised in English language teaching, and have provided brief accounts of theoretical and practical ideas about each skill and the ways they can be taught that have developed over recent years. We have also highlighted several themes that may be useful in guiding readers' reflections as they read the chapters.

Each chapter that follows offers a localized description of a particular facet of teaching the skills, with a view to offering connections to other contexts as well as to overall principles and 'take-away' messages for that particular skill. The practices described and analysed within each chapter are not intended to be 'ideals' or 'models' for teaching a particular skill, but rather exemplifications of issues that are salient for teachers in different parts of the world, who teach in different kinds of programmes. Moreover, while these chapters are research-based in each case, and thus provide evidence, they are not research reports. Instead, they are accounts of practice, underpinned by current theory and the authors' research (mainly practitioner- and classroom-based research), where the focus is on the way a skill is conceptualised and taught in the local context and what this might mean for other teachers and learners. Thus, the majority of contributions to this book are from the perspective of practising teachers, who may also be teacher researchers, or those who work closely and collaboratively with teachers in intact classrooms, who can offer 'teachers' stories' (Jalongo and Isenberg 1995) from the classroom.

Our concluding chapter draws out key themes and messages from the volume as a whole with a view to looking to the future in relation to the learning and teaching of the four skills. It offers suggestions on how readers might interpret and reflect on the various pedagogic perspectives in the book as well as consider their own classroom practices. The final chapter also discusses the nature of pedagogic change and the systems that may support adoption of innovative teaching practices.