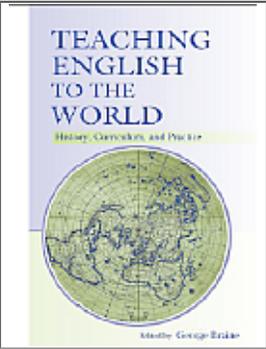


Teaching English to the World: History, Curriculum and Practice

Author:	George Braine, Ed. (2005)		
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Pp. xx + 191	0-8058-5401-0 (paper)	\$22.50 U.S.	

Looking in a mirror is the image that best depicts what reading this book has meant for me. I can hardly think of another book I have felt more identified with after a first reading. ELT in my country (Spain) is not covered here, but the recollections of all these non-native teachers make George Braine's book very close to me and, probably, to the vast majority of EFL teachers around the world. Being myself a non-native teacher of English in high schools and university who has had similar experiences in search of a professional career, I easily felt in the shoes of all those colleagues commissioned to write their chapters. Even though reports on the state of ELT are frequent and numerous, at least in Europe (Bonnet, 2004 or EURYDICE, 2001), and probably elsewhere, this book opens a window of fresh air onto the ELT field. The two reports cited above provide objective information on the state-of-the-art but lack the personal touch this collection of testimonies offers.

The editor is an experienced scholar who has already published another title (Braine, 1999) on the role of non-native teachers in ELT. The one we are reviewing here is intended as a follow-up, with contributions from teachers around the world.

The book is divided into a preface, an introduction, and 15 chapters, with each of the latter devoted to a different country. It closes with brief contributor biographies as well as separate author and subject indexes.

The 15 chapters in the book are structurally consistent: firstly, there is a detailed and informative description of ELT in the respective country; secondly, a review of ELT curricula in each national school system; and, thirdly, a teacher's autobiographical narrative puts the final, personalized touch to the chapter. Chapters are quite well balanced: none of them is considerably shorter or longer than the others, all being 10 or 11 pages. Sometimes, a second author was needed when the "becoming an English teacher" narrator was not born in the country highlighted in the chapter. The countries and, consequently, the chapters are divided into four groups: former British colonies (India, Hong Kong), former colonies of other nations (Brazil, Lebanon), European countries (Poland, Germany), and a group labelled the expanding circle of English (China, Israel, Japan). Unfortunately, there is no section depicting the situation in African countries and just one country, Brazil, featured from the South American continent. Also, there is no representative from countries where Spanish is the first language spoken by the majority of population. (The editor gives reasons why he features the countries he does.)

Within the narratives are brief passages which a reader does not want to skip because of the vivid picture they provide of the effort many non-native English speakers have made to become English teachers. For example, a teacher from China reports that "for about 8 months, I spent all of my time in preparation. . . . To make the best use of time, I wrote English words on small cards and placed them on the front of my bicycle, trying to memorize them while cycling to work" (pp.17-18). In contrast, a teacher from Hong Kong admits so honestly that "the beginning of my teaching career is neither remarkable nor memorable" (p. 41).

Surveying the chapters, a reader can find numerous thought-provoking examples of burning issues in the field of teaching and learning EFL in particular locales or within various educational systems: for instance, the cases in which political regimes and political changes make the foreign language pendulum swing to the opposite direction. Braine points to the difficult stage in ELT during the years of the Chinese Cultural Revolution (ch. 2) or the sinking of Russian as a foreign language in Hungary (ch. 5) and Poland (ch. 11) after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Russian moved from being *the* foreign language to a residual state in less than a decade. In the Polish case, the communist regime's tight control over the educational system reduced the number of approved EFL textbooks to just one or two for each grade level. Strikingly, the 2003 report from the Ministry of National Education lists 43 English textbooks approved just for lower secondary schools (p. 119). Another example of how politics influences language teaching can be found in the figures showing the gap in achievement scores on national tests by the Arab and Jewish communities in Israel (ch. 8). In the Saudi Arabian chapter, the role of oil revenues in the development of ELT is not forgotten either (p. 126).

There are other issues addressed, such as the inadequacy of initial teacher training to meet the needs of the teaching context, as is the case in India (p. 64) where university

teacher preparation courses are literature-oriented, ignoring what the real needs are outside the walls of the college. The study of British literature has been stressed in several countries elsewhere, e.g. Lebanon (p. 109), even in the upper-level courses in secondary education. The lack of resources and materials is also a recurrent topic in different chapters. Braine cites Indonesia (ch. 7) as well as many others making do with limited resources at various periods throughout the 20th century. Presently in Israel (ch. 8), the lack extends to teachers, with the teacher dropout rate very high and the increasing number of English teachers needed not fully satisfied by new university graduates.

The absence of a coherent link between the official school curriculum and the standard school-leaving exams is commented on by teachers in several chapters. Also, under the curriculum umbrella, considerable attention is paid to the importance of time allocation for English within the school timetable and how it affects final outcomes (ch. 7, 8 or 10), and to the gap between ELT theories and real classroom dynamics and interaction. A variety of approaches and curricula are mentioned, from grammar-translation methodology to the apparent success of the communicative approach from the 1980s onward, to classes in which maths and science are taught with English as the medium of instruction (p. 107), for example in Lebanon.

Potential readers and users of *Teaching English to the World* may make up a large group. Yet, to my surprise the author says that the intended audience for the book is a Western one (p. viii). I dare to add, however, that the book will be also welcomed on the Eastern side of the globe; in fact, nine out of fifteen chapters depict the ELT situation extending from Lebanon east to Japan. In my opinion, the book may be a resourceful springboard for students and teachers at different levels: in undergraduate advanced ELT courses, master's and Ph.D. courses, and both pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes. It could be very useful for a reflective approach to both lectures and research.

I would like to close with the words one of the Polish teachers uses to describe her first experience with English and the impact her teacher made on her: "Thus, Liliana started learning English around the age of puberty, and she was fascinated by the teacher, a beautiful young woman who spoke to the pupils in a friendly and reassuring manner. All of this teacher's female learners wanted to become her true image. . . ." (p. 120).

If a succinct label was ever requested for this book, *highly recommended* would say it all.

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