



Language Teaching Research Quarterly

2023, Vol. 33, 191–197



A Personal Tribute to the Life and Work of Jack C. Richards

Roger Barnard

University of Waikato, New Zealand

Received 24 October 2022 *Accepted 30 January 2023*

Abstract

This paper is a tribute to J.C. Richards, whose publications over 50 years have inspired many thousands of language teachers and student-teachers. Particular attention is paid to the three editions of *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*, co-authored with Theo Rodgers, which are reviewed in detail. The author has known Jack Richards for thirty years, whose professional life has influenced his own, especially in terms of encouraging emerging scholars to co-author academic articles and co-edit volumes of case studies. Jack Richards' contributions to academic society extend beyond language teaching and applied linguistics to embrace music, literature and the fine arts, for which he has been honored by many universities. He has been recognized by the international TESOL organization as one of the most significant applied linguists in the world.

Keywords: *Publishing, Language teaching, Co-authoring, Co-editing, Approaches and Methods*

Over the past fifty years, J. C. Richards has inspired hundreds of thousands of applied linguists, language teachers and student teachers through his many conference presentations, consultancies and publications, including over 150 textbooks. His seminal book on error analysis (1974), has been reprinted many times and published again - unchanged - forty years later, remains a standard work on the subject. His later books include several editions of the *Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics* (2013), *Beyond training* (1998) and *Curriculum development in language teaching* (2001).

I, too, have been inspired by the work of Jack Richards: the books mentioned above and many others have enriched the various graduate classes for second language teachers which I taught at

the University of Waikato from 1995 to 2015. In particular, I would like to focus on my personal favourite of his books – *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*, co-authored with Theo Rodgers, with whom he has collaborated since taking up a full professorship at the University of Hawaii in 1981. This article is intended to be a tribute to the work of Jack Richards, but I do not wish to underestimate the contribution of Theo Rodgers; it is difficult, if not impossible, to strand out the separate contributions of individual authors, especially when they have worked together over many years.

The first edition of the book (1986) systematically presented eight language teaching methods and approaches in about 170 pages. After a brief introductory chapter on the long history of language teaching, Chapter Two drew the important distinction between approaches and methods in language teaching: the former being the clarification of assumptions and beliefs about language and language learning, while the latter is when these axioms are put into practice, with specified, and sometimes proscribed, roles, activities and materials. This discussion set the scene for the following nine chapters of the book, each of which followed a similar structure: they introduced the theories of language and language learning which underpinned the specific method/approach, which was then discussed in terms of objectives, syllabus, typical activities, and the roles of teacher, learner and materials. Each chapter ended with a set of contemporary references to relevant published works.

The second (2001) edition retained the same overall structure and was a hundred pages longer. However, the chapters in the first edition which dealt with the ‘designer’ methods of the 1970s and 1980s – Total Physical Response, The Silent Way, Suggestopedia and Community Language Learning were abbreviated: “because these methods are no longer widely used, a shorter treatment seemed appropriate” (page vii). In contrast, Chapters 9 to 13 considered newer approaches: Whole Language, Multiple Intelligences, Neurolinguistic Programming, the Lexical Approach, and Competency-based Language Learning. Thus, the new edition updated the reader with the most recent methodological trends at the time. This second edition substantially retained the original chapters on Communicative Language Teaching and The Natural Approach (though both chapters had updated references), and there were three new chapters on different aspects of communicative teaching: Cooperative Language Learning, Content-based Instruction, and Task-based Language Teaching. In these chapters, therefore, the communicative approach was viewed from a much wider perspective than had been possible fifteen or so years earlier. Whereas the 1986 book concluded with a chapter on comparing and evaluating methods, the final chapter of this second edition discussed a ‘post-methods’ era and the need for language teachers to relate insights gained from ‘brand name’ approaches and methods to their own principles, values and beliefs and apply these to the specific contexts in which they worked. In 2002, I reviewed this book for TESOL Quarterly and, according to ResearchGate, about 60,000 people have read this review, the most recent ones being reported while I was writing this article. This large number is testimony, not to the value of the review, but to the widespread interest in the work of Jack Richards and to the popularity of this book in particular, which by 2006 had been reprinted eleven times.

Not surprisingly, therefore, a third edition was published in 2014. At over 400 pages, it is considerably longer than the two previous editions, containing 22 chapters covering 16 approaches

and methods. A useful innovation is that most of the chapters in the first three parts append sample lesson plans illustrating the particular method or approach. Additionally, each chapter now ends with a set of reflective questions for readers to relate to their own principles, values and practices. I believe that such questions encourage readers to join the academic conversation with the authors, as well as with each other. The reference lists in every chapter in the book have been augmented by more recent relevant books and articles. The book is divided into four parts.

Part I, *Major trends in twentieth-century language teaching*, comprises four chapters:

- 1. A brief history of early developments in language teaching
- 2. The nature of approaches and methods in language teaching
- 3. The Oral approach and Situational Language Teaching
- 4. The Audiolingual Method

These substantially repeat the points made in the equivalent chapters in the second edition; however, there is a new introduction to Chapter 1, a number of clarifications and new examples in all four chapters, and more detailed explanations of the methods under consideration.

Part II comprises a chapter each discussing one of nine *Current approaches and methods*, following the same structure as the previous editions:

- 5. Communicative Language Teaching
- 6. Content-Based Instruction and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)
- 7. Whole Language
- 8. Competency-Based Language Teaching, standards and the Common European

Framework of Reference

- 9. Task-Based Language Teaching
- 10. Text-Based Instruction
- 11. The Lexical Approach
- 12. Multiple Intelligences
- 13. Cooperative Language Learning

Chapter 5 has been brought up-to-date with commentaries on relevant books and articles published since the second edition; for example, the sections on the communicative syllabus and procedures have been expanded, and a notable addition is a section on criticisms of the approach. The Introduction to Chapter 6 emphasizes that both CBI and CLIL are approaches that describe basic design principles - chief among which is the integration of curriculum content with language instruction - but do not prescribe methods that can be used with them. Chapter 7 expands the points made in the second edition that Whole Language is an adaptation of an approach to reading proposed for young first language learners. Its application to foreign language teaching has been criticized, although not so heatedly as has been the case in first language education. The revised Chapter 8 discusses the movement towards outcomes-based education, which focuses attention on what students can do after an instructional program, rather than what is provided by way of input. Competency-Based Language Teaching is essentially a skills-based approach, whose syllabus is a description of learning outcomes, or 'competencies', which have been most comprehensively prescribed in the widely-used Common European Framework of Reference. The up-dated and

reformatted discussion of Task-Based Language Teaching in Chapter 9 is much clearer than its equivalent in the 2001 edition and, like the previous chapter, the focus of the approach is on learning outcomes. The largely re-written Chapter 11 considers Text-Based Instruction which, like TBLL, emphasizes the product of learning; however, in this approach language structures and generic features are explicitly introduced via spoken or written texts. The authors have likewise updated their discussion of Multiple Intelligences in Chapter 12, pointing out that “The literature in MI provides a rich source of classroom ideas regardless of one’s theoretical perspective and can help teachers think about instruction in their classes in unique ways” (p. 240). Based on its use in mainstream education, proponents of MI have suggested various procedures and techniques for promoting effective language learning, but it cannot be considered a specific method of, and perhaps not even a principled approach to, language teaching. Cooperative Language Learning, revisited in the final chapter in Part 2, is an approach also derived from mainstream educational theories and practice. It does not advocate specific language objectives or any particular form of language syllabus or even appropriate materials, but rather seeks to promote critical thinking skills and mutual responsibility by students working in groups. Like some other approaches such as those based on tasks, texts or lexis, the principles of CLL might better be incorporated into an eclectic pedagogical strategy rather than being adopted as the sole approach to language teaching.

Part III, *Alternative twentieth-century approaches and methods*, comprises slightly expanded versions of five of the chapters in the 2001 edition with fuller descriptions of their conceptual frameworks:

- 14. The Natural Approach
- 15. Total Physical Response
- 16. The Silent Way
- 17. Community Language Learning
- 18. Suggestopedia

The authors point out that the reason for including these perhaps rather dated methods is that they offer theoretical and pedagogical insights which have attracted the attention of a number of teachers and educators, and offer strategies and techniques which could be incorporated into other approaches.

These chapters, like those in Part 1, also serve as a valuable historical record of methodological developments in the twentieth century. There are three entirely new chapters in Part IV, *The teaching and learning environment*. Chapter 19 is entitled Learners, approaches and methods, and considers issues such as learner autonomy, strategies and styles as well as the impact of recent technology on teaching and learning. The following chapter, Teachers, approaches and methods, discusses and critiques three options facing teachers: adapting their teaching practices to a particular method; changing the method to suit their own pedagogy; or developing their own personal approach. Chapter 21, Approaches, methods and the curriculum, begins with a discussion of the three key elements in language curricula – input, process and output. This is followed by a detailed explanation of how each of these three can lead, respectively, to forward, central or backward curriculum designs: forward designs begin with statement of language content; central

designs with process, especially classroom interaction; backward designs with the specification of learning outcomes. The conclusion to the chapter points out that there is no best way to design a curriculum, but each design might be more appropriate than the others in certain circumstances.

There is a brief postscript to the book pointing to the value of looking back at historical trends in language teaching, and the need to look forward to the possible future opportunities and challenges that may impact upon the profession of language teaching. An appendix usefully presents a table summarizing the sixteen methods/approaches in terms of their key characteristics, their influence on current language teaching, typical teacher and learner roles and common classroom activities. The book concludes with author and subject indexes containing approximately 700 entries – many more than those in the previous editions.

Jack Richards' career has considerably influenced my own work. I first met him in 1990 while I was working in Oman; he and David Nunan were our external consultants on a textbook-writing project. The straightforward advice he gave was highly appreciated by the team of English language advisers, if not quite so by the Ministry of Education. I was immediately impressed with Jack's ability to think critically and work rapidly, and I appreciated his sardonic sense of humour. He struck me as an excellent role model to strive to emulate. Thereafter, I kept in contact with him by reading, reviewing and using his books, occasionally corresponding, and catching up at various international conferences. In the department of English he had set up in 1989 at the City University of Hong, one of his primary goals was to encourage his junior members of staff to publish in academic journals, and this concern for mentoring emerging academics struck me as excellent professional practice. I was delighted when in 1996 he returned to his New Zealand homeland on appointment as professor of applied linguistics at the University of Auckland. I was then lecturing at the nearby University of Waikato, and we were thus able to meet fairly often for both professional and social purposes, for example when he was the main plenary speaker at the 1996 CLESOL conference in Hamilton. I began to feel that his exceptional talents were not recognised by the university authorities; at the time, the discipline of applied linguistics was a newcomer to the academic community in New Zealand, and some other university colleagues tended to be either ignorant or dismissive of our field. My impression was that the University of Auckland did not appreciate his international scholarly reputation. Within two years, Jack resigned and returned to the Regional English Language Centre (RELC) in Singapore, and concentrated on teaching short courses and workshops there and elsewhere. He also continued to co-author textbooks for language teachers and coursebooks for students, such as *New Interchange* and *Passages*,

I took a leaf from his work in Hong Kong and also his long-standing preference for co-authoring, by scaffolding my own junior colleagues and PhD students to publish (with me, and then alone) in academic journals. Likewise I emulated Jack's preference for co-editing books such as the *Longman Dictionary* and *Approaches and Methods* as well as more recently with Anne Burns, Willy Renandya, Tom Farrell and others. I began by being the second editor to scholars with international reputations such as Maria Torres-Guzman (Barnard & Torres-Guzman, 2009) and Anne Burns (Barnard & Burns, 2012). As my experience and skills grew, I became first editor with my ex-PhD students as second, for example, with Jono Ryan (Barnard & Ryan, 2017) and

Zuwati Hasim (Barnard & Hasim, 2018). More recently, these emerging academics have been first or second authors/editors with and myself as third, or fourth (Gurney et al., 2022; Le et al., 2020).

Jack is extremely generous with his time, advice to colleagues, and the fruits of his work. He frequently records interviews, conference presentations and discussions on platforms like Youtube, and is very willing to accept face-to-face invitations to present his latest work to teachers' groups, for which he charges no fee. (He shared his ideas about the role of emotions in language learning and teaching to colleagues in Hamilton as recently as May 2022.) He is well known for his patronage of fine arts, and has a personal collection of almost a thousand works of Asian decorative craftwork, which since 2014 has been housed in the Jack C. Richards Decorative Arts Gallery in Gisborne, his home town in New Zealand. Passionate about music, he has commissioned numerous works for composers, endowed a musical scholarship and sponsored the Composer in Residence program at Victoria University of Wellington, where he holds an honorary doctorate in literature in recognition of his contributions to language teaching and the arts. He also holds an adjunct professorship there, and also honorary professorships at the Universities of Sydney and Auckland. In 2016, the international TESOL organization recognized Jack Richards as one of the 50 TESOL specialists worldwide to have made a significant impact on language teaching in the last 50 years.

In short, Jack Richards is a man of many excellent parts, and it is a great privilege to have known him for so many years.

References

- Barnard, R., & Burns, A. (Eds.) (2012). *Researching language teacher cognition and practice: International case studies*. Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847697912>
- Barnard, R., & Hasim, Z. (Eds.) (2018). *English medium instruction programmes; Perspectives from South East Asian universities*.: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315397627>
- Barnard, R., & Ryan, J. (Eds.) (2017). *Reflective Practice: Voices from the Field*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315397665>
- Barnard, R., & Torres-Guzman, M. E. (Eds.) (2009). *Creating Communities of Learning: International case studies and perspectives*. Multilingual Matters.
- Gurney, Y., Wang, Y., & Barnard, R. (Eds.) (2022). *Narratives of qualitative PhD research: Identities, languages and cultures in transition*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003256823>
- Le, V. C., Nguyen, T. M. H., Nguyen, T. T. M., & Barnard, R. (2020). *Building Teacher Capacity in Vietnamese English Language Teaching: Research, Policy and Practice*. Routledge.
- Richards, J. C. (1974). *Error Analysis: Perspectives on second language acquisition*. Longman.
- Richards, J. C. (1998). *Beyond training: Perspectives on language teacher education*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S1984-63982001000100010>
- Richards, J. C. (2001). *Curriculum development in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667220>
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (1986). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667305>
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009024532>
- Richards, J. C., & Schmidt, R. (2013). *Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics* (4th ed.). Routledge.

Acknowledgements

Not applicable.

Funding

Not applicable.

Ethics Declarations

Competing Interests

No, there are no conflicting interests.

Rights and Permissions

Open Access

This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. You may view a copy of Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License here: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.