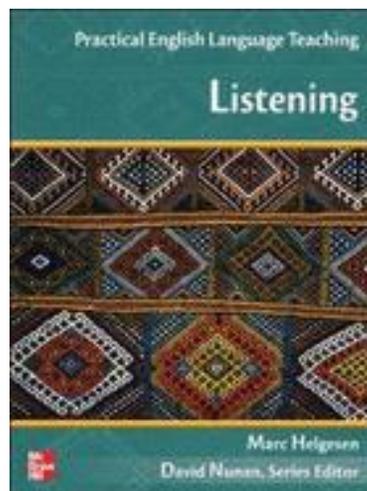


Book Review

Title: Practical English Language Teaching: Listening
Editor: David Nunan
Authors: Marc Helgesen and Steven Brown
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Reviewers: Punjaporn Pojanapunya and Wilaksana Srimavin



“Practical English Language Teaching: Listening” is one in a series of special-interest books for teachers of English. The book is intended to provide background to principles and practical aspects of teaching listening through step-by-step guidance for both novice and experienced teachers.

This book is classified into 5 chapters. Each chapter contains principles, techniques, and activities for teaching listening in different levels from beginning to advanced learners. In the beginning of each chapter, the authors give clear goals and provide a good overview of what is going to be focused on. The principles and methodologies are presented through real classroom scenarios and textbook excerpts which teachers can compare to their real classroom situations. “Reflection” and “Action” are the two major features in every chapter which provide questions and tasks to help develop readers’ thinking about critical issues in teaching, and apply principles, strategies and techniques they learned from the book to different situations. At the end of each chapter, listening resources are also given in the “Further readings”, “Helpful Websites” and “References” sections.

In an opening chapter, “What is listening?” is an orientation to key principles for teaching and assessing listening. The authors give some definitions of listening as a lead-in to more ideas on how people listen. They also mention a task-based approach, one of the key approaches that help learners to be successful in listening. Readers could realize and evaluate their teaching practice in the classroom whether they teach or test their learners through the explanation of the two terms, teaching and testing, that are pointed out by the authors. Moreover, giving an example by

using a metaphor to clarify the ideas of the “top-down” vs. “bottom-up” processing is very helpful to show how different the two processes are. The instructions of implementing the tasks are clear through good sequencing of teaching steps.

“Key issues in teaching listening” in chapter 5 provides important aspects in listening beyond the classroom including suggestions for using technology, dealing with learners who have different learning styles and strategies, and extensive learning outside class. Rather than proposing only the key ideas of the authors, “Top five lists of ideas for listening teachers” gives tips by leading experts in listening discipline such as David Nunan (p. 147), Jack Richards (p. 148), Michael Rost (p. 149), John Flowerdew and Lindsay Miller (p. 150), and Tony Lynch (p. 151) in separate tip boxes.

Chapters 2-4 follow the same structure to introduce readers to teaching of listening for beginning, intermediate and advanced level learners. While chapters 1 and 5 provide readers background and key issues related to teaching listening, some busy teachers may want to look for practical techniques and tools for teaching and assessing listening instead. They can go to chapter 2, 3, or 4, teaching listening ideas for beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels. Since these three chapters have the same content structure, a detailed discussion on one of them may suffice to suggest to readers how they can make use of these sections.

The clear objectives of the authors are explicitly stated on the first page of chapter 2; for example, readers should be able to “describe characteristics of beginning learners”, “explain the difference between comprehension questions and tasks”, and “identify characteristics you consider important in tasks” when they finish reading. These clear goals help readers have clear expectation and prepare themselves for reading. The main sections include Introduction, Syllabus design issues, Principles for teaching listening to beginning learners, Tasks and materials, Listening in beginning classroom, Assessing beginning learners, and Conclusion, as well as a reading list for further study, helpful web sites, and references. The first four sections contain Reflection, Action, and narrative explanations which allow readers to think, do some activities, and read the explanations from the authors. Especially in Tasks and materials, a number of examples of teaching materials in a logical organisation based on listening sub-skills such as listening for specific purposes, listening for gist, and inferencing are provided. At the same time, readers are asked to notice the instructions and content of the materials to lead them to think how to apply each kind of material in the classroom. They can also try to learn

about the materials through actual listening to many examples included in an audio CD. As mentioned, the example tasks vary in terms of task lay-out and task purposes. The variety here should encourage the teachers to think more about adopting or adapting those tasks for their learners. The subsequent section clearly points out many good ideas on how to use a teacher's manual effectively which is very useful, especially for novice teachers. Concerning learner assessment, the authors also give descriptions of different forms of assessment, roles of teachers, and useful assessment techniques.

However, the book is likely to have a limitation relating to practical concepts which might not satisfy readers' expectations. For us, the practical issues for teaching listening suggested by the authors might not be perceived as especially brilliant by experienced teachers. Although numbers of ready-to-use practical ideas and techniques are provided in the book, they are probably considered simply another collection of teaching techniques and materials. In our view, however, teachers can still learn from this set of ideas and techniques in many ways. For example, the theoretical part of the book can help them brush up on what to be concerned about in teaching. They can also adjust and implement the practical part to fit their teaching style and context. Once these ideas have been implemented, it can be their starting point for sharing and discussing with colleagues for teaching development. The ideas from the book can be teachers' inspirations including being open to be agreed or disagreed with by readers depending on individual teaching style and context.

Overall, we would recommend this book to teachers teaching listening skills, especially novices. The book is well-structured and written in a friendly and comprehensive way. Because the authors achieve their purposes they set out in individual chapters, readers do not need to read this book from the beginning to the end, but rather based primarily on their needs. It is a very useful resource for self-study, and is based on the experience of the authors. It contains ideas that range from the general to the specific – the theoretical background to teaching listening in the beginning, more specific content with guidance for application for different levels of learners in the middle, and an attempt to broaden readers' knowledge and concepts of key issues in teaching listening as concluding remarks in the end.

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