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The Cambridge Guide to

Pedagogy
and Practice
in Second
Language
Teaching

Edited by

Anne Burns

Jack C. Richards



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PREFACE

The present volume arose from the need for an authoritative set of core readings covering central issues in second language teaching. Approaches and practices in language teaching are constantly being revised and rethought as a result of the impact of changing understandings of the nature of language learning and teaching as well as in response to the growing demand by educational authorities and institutions around the world for more effective second language teaching programs. This guide seeks to provide an accessible yet comprehensive overview of key issues and current approaches in second language teaching as a resource for student-teachers, teachers, and teacher educators.

Contributors to the book were asked to provide a concise overview of their topic, drawing on current theory, research, and practice in order to clarify the key issues that current practice addresses, and to identify additional key readings related to the issue they address. These issues range from the role of English as an International Language, the nature of second language teaching and learning, the roles, identities, and beliefs of teachers and learners, the contexts of learning, learning styles and strategies, current approaches and practices in language instruction, and the role of media and materials in language teaching.

We hope that this collection of original papers will provide a valuable resource and reference for those involved in different aspects of second language teaching.

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INTRODUCTION

Pedagogy and Practice in Second Language Teaching: An Overview of the Issues

Jack C. Richards and Anne Burns

The teaching of second languages, particularly English, is a vast international enterprise. Increasingly, proficiency in English is seen as the key to accessing the educational, technical, and knowledge resources that contemporary societies depend on. But the demand for competent English users, as well as adequately prepared English teachers, often exceeds the supply. Consequently in recent years there has been a dramatic change in the scope of English language teaching worldwide, and as a result, growing demands on those charged with providing an adequate response to the impact of the worldwide spread of English. There is increasing need for language programs that deliver the language skills and competencies required by today's global citizens and a demand from governments for more effective approaches to the preparation of language teachers. It is this gap between demand and supply that provides the motivation for cycles of curriculum review and innovation in many parts of the world. Such innovations may include increasing the time allocated to English in public education, commencing the teaching of English at primary school, teaching some school subjects through English, importing native speakers to work alongside national teachers in high schools, or increasing the weighting given to English in college and university entrance exams.

As a consequence of the growing demand for effective English programs, language teaching professionals are engaged in a continual review and evaluation of their assumptions and practices. The emergence of approaches such as reflective teaching, task-based pedagogy, genre theory, and action research are examples of how the language teaching profession undergoes periodic waves of renewal and paradigm shifts as it continually reinvents itself through the impact of new ideas, new educational philosophies, new technology, and new research findings. The present volume seeks to document such changes through a comprehensive overview of current approaches and practices in language teaching. In this book, 30 chapters focus on key issues in second-language teaching, drawing on current theory, research, and practice to identify present trends as well as future directions. In the process of this review a number of key issues emerge.

CHANGED UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOALS OF TEACHING

Today English is so widely taught worldwide that the purposes for which it is learned are sometimes taken for granted. Thirty years ago the assumption was that teaching English was a politically neutral activity and acquiring it would bring untold blessings to those who succeeded in learning it and lead to educational and economic empowerment. English was regarded as the property of the English-speaking world, particularly the United Kingdom and the United States. Native speakers of the language had special insights and superior knowledge about teaching it. And it was, above all, the vehicle for the expression of a rich and advanced culture or cultures whose literary artifacts had universal value.

This picture has changed somewhat today. As McKay (2002; this volume, chap. 1) points out, now that English is the language of globalization, international communication, commerce and trade, tourism, the media, and pop culture, different motivations for learning it come into play. English is no longer viewed as the property of the English-speaking world but is an international commodity sometimes referred to as World English or English as an international language. The cultural values of the United Kingdom and the United States are often seen as irrelevant to language teaching, except in situations where the learner has a pragmatic need for such information. The language teacher need no longer be an expert on British and American culture and a literature specialist as well. English is still promoted as a tool that will assist with educational and economic advancement but is viewed in many parts of the world as one that can be acquired without any of the cultural trappings that go with it.

NEW DIRECTIONS IN METHODOLOGY

Since the 1990s, the methodology known as communicative language teaching has been widely adopted as a framework for teaching English worldwide. However, since it describes a set of very general principles grounded in the notion of communicative competence as the goal of second and foreign language teaching, there is no single or agreed upon set of practices that characterize current interpretations of communicative language teaching. Indeed, many practitioners today are hesitant to use the term, preferring to base their pedagogy on a set of general principles that can be applied in different ways, depending on the teaching context, the age of the learners, their level, their learning goals, and so on. These principles reflect changed understandings of the nature of second language learning and teaching and can be summarized as follows:

- Second language learning is facilitated when learners are motivated to learn and are engaged in interaction and meaningful communication.
- Effective classroom learning tasks and exercises provide opportunities for students to negotiate meaning, expand their language resources, notice how language is used, and take part in meaningful interpersonal exchange.
- Meaningful communication results from students processing content that is relevant, purposeful, interesting, and engaging.
- Communication is a holistic process that often calls upon the use of several language skills or modalities.
- Language learning is facilitated both by activities that involve inductive or discovery learning of underlying rules of language use and organization, as well as by those involving language analysis and reflection.
- Language learning is a gradual process that involves creative use of language and trial and error. Although errors are a normal product of learning the ultimate

goal of learning is to be able to use the new language both accurately and fluently.

- Learners develop their own routes to language learning, progress at different rates, and have different needs and motivations for language learning.
- Successful language learning involves the use of effective learning and communication strategies.
- The role of the teacher in the language classroom is that of a facilitator and language expert who creates a classroom climate conducive to language learning and provides supportive opportunities for students to use and practice the language and to reflect on language use and language learning.
- The classroom is a community where learners learn through collaboration and sharing.

Jacobs and Farrell (2001) suggest that these principles are reflected in the following trends in current language teaching methodology, which are illustrated throughout this volume:

1. **Learner autonomy:** Learners are given greater choice over their own learning, both in terms of the content of learning and in the learning processes they can employ. This is seen in the use of group-based learning, self-assessment, learner training, and other learner-centered approaches (chapter 12, Legutke).
2. **The social nature of learning:** Learning is not an individual private activity but a social one that depends upon interaction with others. Such interaction can create the motivation for learning (chapter 8, Ushioda). Creating a supportive classroom climate involves using principles of group dynamics and is a key condition for successful learning (chapter 4, Senior).
3. **Curricular integration:** The connection between different strands of the curriculum is emphasized so that English is not seen as a stand-alone subject but is linked to other subjects in the curriculum as well as to learners' out-of-class interests (chapter 12, Legutke; chapter 16, Crandall). Text-based learning (chapter 15, Burns; chapter 18, Brick) reflects this approach, and seeks to develop fluency in text types that can be used across the curriculum. Project work in language teaching also requires students to explore issues outside of the language classroom.
4. **Focus on meaning:** Meaning is viewed as the driving force of learning. Content-based, theme-based, and task-based teaching reflect this view and seek to make the exploration of meaning through content and tasks the core of language learning activities (chapter 9, Bell; chapter 14, Van den Branden; chapter 15, Burns).
5. **Diversity:** Today's English learners are characterized by diversity, differing in their motivations, needs, abilities, learning styles, learning histories, and cultural backgrounds (chapter 6, Wright; chapter 9, Bell). Teaching needs to take these differences into account rather than assuming that students approach learning in a uniform manner. This has led to more active learner involvement in choosing the content and manner of learning, offering choices, more support for learners, and emphasis on developing students' use and awareness of learning strategies (chapter 3, Benson).
6. **Thinking skills:** Language should serve as a means of developing higher-order thinking skills, i.e., critical and creative thinking. In language teaching this means that students do not learn language for its own sake but in order to develop and apply their thinking skills in situations that go beyond the language classroom (chapter 12, Legutke; chapter 20, Kern).

7. **Alternative assessment:** New forms of assessment replace traditional multiple-choice and other items that test lower-order skills. Multiple forms of assessment (e.g., observation, interviews, journals, portfolios) can be used to build up a comprehensive picture of what students can do in a second language.
8. **Teachers as colearners:** The teacher is viewed as engaged in a process of experimentation, reflection, and discovery, expanding his or her understanding of teaching through the process of teaching. This may be facilitated through various forms of reflective inquiry (chapter 2, Bailey) including action research and other forms of classroom investigation. Such activities are often carried out collaboratively.

RETHINKING THE NATURE OF TEACHING

The nature of teaching itself has been reimagined in applied linguistics with the influence of cognitive and sociocultural perspectives on teaching. Teacher cognition encompasses the mental lives of teachers, how these are formed, what they consist of, and how teachers' beliefs, thoughts, and thinking processes shape their understanding of teaching and their classroom practices. Teacher cognition research introduced a focus on teacher decision making, on teachers' theories of teaching, teachers' representations of subject matter, and the problem-solving and improvisational skills employed by teachers with different levels of teaching experience during teaching (Borg 2006). Constructs such as teachers' practical knowledge, pedagogic content knowledge, and personal theories of teaching noted above are now established components of our understanding of teacher cognition (chapter 5, Richards). From the perspective of teacher cognition, teaching is not simply the application of knowledge and of learned skills. It is viewed as a much more complex cognitively driven process affected by the classroom context, the teachers general and specific instructional goals, the learners' motivations and reactions to the lesson, and the teacher's management of critical moments during a lesson. At the same time teaching reflects the teacher's personal response to such issues; hence teacher cognition is very much concerned with teachers' personal and "situated" approaches to teaching. Borg's (2006) survey of research on teacher cognition shows how research has clarified such issues as the relationship between teacher cognition and classroom practice, the impact of context on language teacher's cognitions and practices, the processes of preservice teacher learning in language teaching, the relationship between cognitive change and behavioral change in language teachers, and the nature of expertise in language teaching.

Sociocultural perspectives on learning emphasize that learning takes place in specific settings or contexts that shape how learning takes place (Johnson 2006; Lantolf 2000; Lave and Wenger 1991). The location of language learning may be a classroom, a workplace, or an informal social setting, and these different contexts for learning create different potentials for learning. Sociocultural theory draws on Vygotsky's notion of the zone of proximal development, which focuses on the gap between what the learner can currently do and the next stage in learning – the level of potential development – and how learning occurs through negotiation between the learner and a more advanced language user during which a process known as scaffolding occurs (chapter 15, Burns). To take part in these processes the learner must develop interactional competence, the ability to manage exchanges despite limited language development. Personality, motivation, cognitive style may all play a role in influencing the learner's willingness to take risks, his or her openness to social interaction, and attitudes toward the target language and users of the target language, all of which can be developed and strengthened through teaching. At the same time, successful learning is contingent upon the teacher fostering the social dynamics of the classroom and encouraging

the class to function as an effective learning community where learners support each other's learning (chapter 4, Senior).

CHANGING MODELS OF SECOND LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Language teaching seeks to develop proficiency in language use, although there is no common consensus as to what the construct of proficiency entails and how best it can be acquired. Traditional views of language proficiency attributed a primary role to grammar in language learning and language use (McCarthy 2001). Syllabuses were essentially grammar based, grammar was a primary focus of teaching techniques, and sentence-based practice was viewed as the key to learning. In the 1970s the emergence of the notion of communicative competence and functional approaches to the study of language led to the development of communicative methodologies to replace the grammar-based methodologies of audiolingualism and situational language teaching. However, the adoption of communicative and fluency-based methodologies did not resolve the issue of the status of grammar in language teaching, which continues to arouse debate (chapter 27, Cullen). Programs where there was an extensive use of "authentic communication," particularly in the early stages of learning, reported that students often developed fluency at the expense of accuracy, resulting in learners with good communication skills but a poor command of grammar and a high level of fossilization (Higgs and Clifford 1982). To address this issue, recent trends in language teaching have included (a) incorporating a more explicit treatment of grammar within a text-based curriculum (chapter 15, Burns; chapter 27, Cullen), (b) building a syllabus and teaching and testing activities around tasks that involve communicative language use as well as attention to grammatical form (chapter 14, Van den Branden); (c) introducing activities involving consciousness raising and "noticing" grammatical features of input or output, (d) using activities that require "stretched output," i.e., which expand or "restructure" the learner's grammatical system though increased communicative demands and attention to linguistic form, and (e) opportunities for meaningful and communicative practice of grammar (Swain 2000; Cullen this volume, chap. 27).

While the field of second language acquisition research has done much to inform the role of grammar in language teaching, it has tended to give scant attention to other aspects of language proficiency, namely the mastery of the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing – the focus of most language programs and international tests. Consequently, approaches to the teaching of the four skills has tended to develop independently of the SLA research industry. These developments have been shaped by advances in the study of written and spoken discourse as well as by advances in technology (chapter 29, Levy).

LISTENING

The teaching of listening now receives much greater emphasis than it did in the past. Traditional views of listening saw it as the mastery of discrete skills or microskills (e.g., Richards 1983). Later, theoretical models of comprehension from the field of cognitive psychology began to inform the teaching of listening. It was from this source that the distinction between bottom-up processing and top-down processing was derived, a distinction that led to an awareness of the importance of background knowledge and schema in comprehension. The bottom-up model holds that listening is a linear, data-driven process. The top-down model of listening, by contrast, involves the listener in actively constructing meaning based on expectations, inferences, intentions, knowledge of schema, and other relevant prior knowledge and by a selective processing of the input. Listening came to be viewed as an interpretive process, although as Field points out (this volume, chap. 22), the importance

of word-level decoding in listening has tended to be neglected with an overemphasis on the role of top-down processes. Listening instruction has also been informed by the fields of conversation analysis and discourse analysis. Study of the organization of spoken discourse has led to the realization that written texts read aloud cannot provide a suitable basis for developing the abilities needed to process real-time, authentic discourse. Authenticity in materials became a catchword and part of a pedagogy of teaching listening that is now well established in language teaching (chapter 22, Field; chapter 28, Tomlinson).

SPEAKING

Speaking, including pronunciation, has always been a major focus of language teaching; however both the nature of speaking skills and approaches to teaching them have undergone a major shift in thinking in recent years. Speaking in traditional methodologies usually meant “repeating after the teacher, reciting a memorized dialogue, or responding to a mechanical drill” (Shrum and Glisan 2000, p. 26), reflecting the sentence-based view of proficiency prevailing in the methodologies of Audiolingualism and Situational Language Teaching. The theory of communicative competence prompted proposals for the development of communicative syllabuses, leading initially to proposals for notional and functional syllabuses and more recently proposals for task-based and text-based syllabuses and methodologies. Fluency became a goal for speaking courses, and this can be developed through the use of information-gap and other tasks that involve negotiation, interaction, feedback, and the use of communication strategies that require learners to attempt real communication despite limited proficiency in English. In so doing the teacher and other learners provide support for the oral practice and assisted performance that help develop speaking skills (chapter 21, Thornbury). At the same time the need for accuracy-based activities to complement a focus on fluency work has also been highlighted. Swain (2000) proposed that successful language acquisition requires not only comprehensible input, but also comprehensible output, that is, language produced by the learners that can be understood by other speakers of the language. Swain suggested that when learners have to make efforts to ensure that their messages are communicated (pushed output) this puts them in a better position to notice the gap between their productions and those of proficient speakers, thus fostering accuracy in second-language development. Managed output here refers to tasks and activities that require the use of certain target-language forms, i.e., which “stretch” the learner’s language knowledge and that consequently require a “restructuring” of that knowledge. Ferris (this volume, chap. 24) reviews a number of strategies that can be used to address accuracy in pronunciation.

The notion of English as an International Language has also prompted a revision of the notion of communicative competence to that of “intercultural competence,” a goal for both native speakers and language learners, and which focuses on learning how to communicate in ways that are appropriate in cross-cultural settings (chapter 12, Legutke). At the same time it is now accepted that models for oral interaction cannot be based simply on the intuitions of applied linguists and textbook writers but should be informed by the findings of conversation analysis, discourse analysis, and corpus analysis of authentic speech (chapter 15, Burns; chapter 21, Thornbury).

READING

As with the teaching of listening, second language reading ability was traditionally viewed as the mastery of specific reading subskills. Bottom-up views of reading dominated theory and pedagogy, and reading tended to be taught by providing texts (usually contrived texts

written from word lists) which students read and then answered comprehension questions about (chapter 23, Anderson). In many classrooms there was little difference in approach between teaching reading and testing reading. Advanced reading served as a form of cultural enrichment rather than addressing any real-world goals.

More recently, the fields of psycholinguistics, cognitive science, discourse, and text analysis, as well as second language reading research, have considerably enriched understanding of second language reading processes. Such research has suggested that L2 readers can benefit from the understanding of text structures and from the use of text-mapping strategies that highlight text structures and their function (Grabe 2009). Differences between proficient and nonproficient readers has been another focus of research and generated interest in the value of strategy instruction. The teaching of reading has been one area where strategy training is seen to be teachable, particularly with less proficient readers (chapter 23, Anderson). The role of vocabulary in reading has also been extensively researched (chapter 24, Ferris). Hu and Nation (2000) found that a vocabulary of 5000 words was needed to read short, unsimplified novels for pleasure, while Hazenberg and Hulstijn (1996) found that twice as many words as that were needed to read first-year university material. Both studies emphasize the need for vocabulary development as a component of a reading course since L2 learners typically are underprepared for reading unsimplified texts.

Although L2 reading programs are often designed to serve the needs of learners needing reading for academic purposes, the role English plays as the language in globalization in the information and communication age is also prompting a rethinking of approaches to the teaching of reading in many parts of the world. Students must now learn how to apply what they have learned, to use knowledge to solve problems, and to be able to transfer learning to new situations. Educationists argue that learners need to develop effective analytical processing skills through reading, problem solving, and critical thinking, and to develop technical reading skills rather than those used for literary reading. These need to be based on the use of authentic texts. In addition information-literacy skills are needed, i.e., the skills needed to access, analyze, authenticate, and apply information acquired from different sources and turn it into useful personal knowledge (Jukes and McCain 2001).

WRITING

The status of writing within language teaching has also changed considerably (chapter 24, Ferris). In the past, learning to write in a second language was mainly seen to involve developing linguistic and lexical knowledge as well as familiarity with the syntactic patterns and cohesive devices that form the building blocks of texts. Learning to write involved imitating and manipulating models provided by the teacher and was closely linked to learning grammar. Later the focus in teaching writing shifted to the paragraph-pattern approach with a focus on the use of topic sentences, supporting sentences, and transitions and practice with different functional patterns such as narration, description, comparison-contrast, and exposition. In the 1990s process writing introduced a new dimension into the teaching of writing with an emphasis on the writer and the strategies used to produce a piece of writing.

More recently second-language writing instruction has been influenced by genre and literacy perspectives. These look at the ways in which language is used for particular purposes in particular contexts, i.e., the use of different genres of writing. Writing is seen as involving a complex web or relations between writer, reader, text, and real world knowledge (chapter 20, Kern; chapter 24, Ferris) Discourse communities such as those of business executives, applied linguists, technicians, and advertising copywriters possess

a shared understanding of the texts they use and create and the cultural assumptions underlying them and expectations as to the formal and functional features of such texts. Genre research has examined different types of written genres (e.g., narrative, descriptive, argumentative writing), as well as different text types (e.g., research reports, business letters, essay examinations, technical reports). Writers not only need realistic strategies for drafting and revising texts but also a clear understanding of the meanings and implications of texts to be able to structure their writing experienced according to the demands and constraints of particular contexts (chapter 19, Paltridge). And younger writers need opportunities to create texts that express their individuality and are not produced merely as evidence of learning (chapter 12, Legutke).

RETHINKING THE ROLES OF LEARNERS

In recent years there has also been a substantial change in where and how learning takes place and the role that learners play in the learning process. In the past teaching mainly took place in the classroom and in the language laboratory. With the advent of communicative teaching and learner-centered approaches in the 1990s, learning began to move away from the teacher's direct control and into the hands of learners through the use of individualized learning, group work, and project work (chapter 3, Benson). Technology has further increased the distance between teachers and learners and created new opportunities for learning. Learning is not confined to the classroom: it can take place at home or in other places as well as at school, using the computer and other forms of technology. Today's teachers and learners live in a technology-enhanced learning environment. Videos, computers, and the Internet are accessible to almost all teachers and learners, and in smart schools the language laboratory has been turned into a multimedia center that supports online learning. Technology has facilitated the shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered and blended learning, creating both new challenges and opportunities for teachers and learners (chapter 29 Levy; chapter 30, Reinders). Students, particularly teenagers, now spend large amounts of time in the digital world – time interacting not with the teacher, but with other learners using chat rooms that provide access to more authentic input and learning processes and that make language learning available at any time (chapter 12, Legutke).

A priority for teachers is understanding the specific characteristics and dispositions of one's learners, whether they be young children, teenagers, or adults (chapter 11, Pinter; chapter 12, Legutke; chapter 13, Orem) and making learners (rather than the lesson or the method) the focus of teaching. This involves understanding learners' needs and goals, communicating trust and respect for them, acknowledging diversity of needs and learning styles, giving feedback on their learning in ways which help develop their confidence and self-esteem and minimize loss of face, and using strategies that help develop an atmosphere of collaboration and mutual support among learners (Dörnyei 2001; Lamb 2003). Experienced teachers create learner-centered teaching by drawing on their familiarity with typical student behaviors, by using their knowledge of learners to make predictions about what might happen in the classroom, by choosing texts and tasks that engage their learners and provide opportunities for creative experimentation with the target language (chapter 12, Legutke; chapter 16, Crandall) and by building their lessons around students' difficulties and using strategies to maintain active student involvement in lessons (Lynch 2001). They recognize that language learning is not necessarily a direct consequence of good teaching but depends on understanding the different ways in which learners learn, the role of individual learning styles, motivations, backgrounds, and purposes in learning, and the understanding that at teaching needs to be adapted to their students' individual as well as collective needs (Tarone and Yule 1989; Benson 2005).

THE ROLE OF CONTEXT

A message that recurs throughout this volume is that each teaching context is different and effective language teaching involves understanding what the characteristics of the teaching context are and how they shape the nature of teaching and learning (chapter 5, Richards). McKay points out that different contexts for the use of English create different standards or norms for the use of English and that standards should be determined by local rather than external contexts of use. Native-speaker models for the pronunciation of English are not necessarily considered an appropriate target (Jenkins 2000; Thornbury this volume, chap. 21). Sociocultural perspectives on learning emphasize that learning is situated, i.e., it takes place in specific settings or contexts that shape how learning takes place. The location of language learning may be a classroom, a workplace, or an informal social setting, and these different contexts for learning create different potentials for learning. The context may be a campus-based ESL program, a public school, a community college, or a private language institute. The learners may be children, teenagers, or adults and may represent a variety of different social, economic, cultural, and educational backgrounds. Classes may vary from 10 to 60 or more students (chapter 10, Shamin) and contain students of varying abilities, motivations, and levels (chapter 9, Bell), all of which pose particular problems for teachers. Teaching thus involves understanding the dynamics and relationships within the classroom and the rules and behaviors specific to a particular setting. Wright (this volume, chap. 6) emphasizes that a key factor in teaching is managing the classroom so that it provides favorable conditions for learning.

Differing contexts for learning also represent different purposes for language learning as well as different priorities in terms of learning needs. Students' learning needs may be related to study skills, academic literacy, travel, social survival, or employment and each learning context requires the mastery of specific genres of discourse with their own linguistic characteristics, i.e., mastering the language of particular discourse communities (chapter 18, Brick; chapter 19, Paltridge). From the 1960s in language teaching there was a growing recognition of the demand for specialized language programs to meet the diverse needs and contexts of language learners, and needs analysis procedures increasingly began to be introduced into language teaching. By the 1980s a "need-based philosophy" emerged in language teaching, particularly in relation to the design of special purposes language courses (e.g., English for science students) and vocationally oriented program design (e.g., English for nurses, English for engineers) (Richards 2001). Needs analysis is a now a standard procedure in the design of language programs (chapter 24, Ferris). Examples in this volume include needs analysis from the perspective of ESP and EAP courses, task-based teaching, and text-based teaching (chapter 14, Van Den Branden; chapter 15, Burns; chapter 18, Brick; chapter 19, Paltridge).

The need for context-specific courses also creates a demand for context-specific materials. Tomlinson (this volume, chap. 28), argues that global materials designed for use worldwide cannot meet the needs of learners in specific learning environments with specific learning objectives, for whom teacher-made local materials are often more appropriate.

ORGANIZATIONAL AND MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVES

In the last decade or so language teaching has also been influenced by concepts and practices from the corporate world. In the past, four ingredients were seen as essential to provide for effective teaching: teachers, methods, course design, and tests. Teaching was viewed rather narrowly as a self-contained activity that did not need to look much beyond itself.