

Farrell, T.S.C. & Jacobs, G.M. (2020). Essentials for Successful English Language Teaching. Bloomsbury Publishing

Allyson Eamer

Volume 25, Number 2, Fall 2022

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1096924ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37213/cjal.2022.32526>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

University of New Brunswick

ISSN

1920-1818 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Eamer, A. (2022). Review of [Farrell, T.S.C. & Jacobs, G.M. (2020). Essentials for Successful English Language Teaching. Bloomsbury Publishing]. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics / Revue canadienne de linguistique appliquée*, 25(2), 148–149. <https://doi.org/10.37213/cjal.2022.32526>

Copyright © Allyson Eamer, 2022



This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

Farrell, T.S.C, & Jacobs, G.M. (2020). *Essentials for Successful English Language Teaching*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Reviewer: Allyson Eamer, Ontario Tech University, Oshawa, Ontario, Canada

In 2020, Thomas S. C. Farrell and George M. Jacobs published a revised version of their 2010 original work, aimed at supporting language teachers. They begin with an excellent account of the evolution of communicative language teaching (CLT) from its onset in the early 1970s through to present day. The authors rightly lament that the paradigm shift has resulted in considerable ambiguity, with CLT implementation happening in piecemeal approaches. They have selected, for elaboration, what they consider to be the eight most essential and interconnected changes associated with the CLT shift. Although an explicit discussion of how the authors arrived at these specific eight essentials is not presented, readers will find that the book unfolds in a very engaging manner and offers helpful ideas along with substantial theoretical underpinning for each of the eight *essentials*.

The preface includes a very helpful guide to getting the most out of the book, providing the reader with a roadmap through the eight *essentials* - framed as imperatives: 1) Encourage Learner Autonomy; 2) Emphasize the Social Nature of Learning; 3) Develop Curricular Integration; 4) Focus on Meaning; 5) Celebrate Diversity; 6) Expand Thinking Skills; 7) Utilize Alternative Assessment Methods; and 8) Promote Language Teachers as Co-Learners. Each of the eight *essentials* has been assigned its own chapter that is structured with an opening vignette, the theoretical foundation for the specific essential, a description of classroom implications, a look at the role of both the teachers and the students, and a reflections section that consists of questions directed at the reader, ensuring engagement and investment. These questions, combined with the very accessible building-block approach to presenting content, result in a book that could easily serve as required reading within a TESOL teacher-training program.

There are key takeaways from each of the eight *essential* chapters that will prove quite helpful in operationalizing the *essentials* in the language classroom. In Chapter 2, the authors focus on learner autonomy. They suggest that teachers should anticipate resistance when directing their students to consult each other (rather than the teacher exclusively) for linguistic information. They provide helpful strategies for ensuring that students do not lead each other astray when addressing each other's language questions. In Chapter 3, teachers are advised to establish collaboration as a value in the classroom by making it a thematic topic for study, in addition to using it as an instructional strategy. The authors suggest that this practice will result in a deeper awareness of the social nature of learning and its corresponding benefits.

Chapter 4 presents language across the curriculum and content-based instruction as avenues through which curricular integration can be achieved. Chapter 5 introduces constructivism as a foundational principle in designing learning opportunities that allow students to focus on meaning. The authors are to be commended for their emphasis on diversity in Chapter 6. They call for teacher awareness and sensitivity with respect to a wide range of identity markers (e.g., ethnicity, race, religion, class, ability) and underscore the importance of including culturally relevant and sensitive materials. Chapters 7 (higher-order thinking skills) and 8 (alternative assessment) underscore that learning should mirror real-life conditions and complexities. To steer teachers away from a one-size-fits-all approach to instruction and assessment, readers learn about Bloom's Taxonomy, twenty-first-century competencies, problem-based learning, peer assessment, portfolios, and self-reporting. The final *essential*,

discussed in Chapter 9, presents communities of practice, mentoring, coaching, and research as the means by which language teachers can maintain career-long roles as learners, alongside their students. The authors present compelling research demonstrating how ongoing professional learning results in enhanced career growth paths, innovative teaching practices, learning-modelling for students and contributions to scholarly discourse.

Readers, familiar with the first edition of this book, should note that the second edition includes updated vignettes and references which reflect the developments in the field of second language teaching over the past ten years. While maintaining the same structure as the original book, the authors have added a chapter explicitly addressing how technology and cooperative learning can facilitate the implementation of these eight *essentials*. That said, one could argue the case for a more critical approach to the implementation of each of the *essentials*. For example, recent research indicates that students, whose migration has involved trauma, need a delicate balance of student-led learning (that affords a sense of agency) and teacher-led learning (that affords the assurance of predictability). Even for those learners who have not experienced trauma, it is not uncommon to hear that some students perceive too much learner autonomy (*essential* #1) as laziness or incompetence on the part of the teacher. Thus, a greater focus on the complexities associated with each *essential* could preempt teachers implementing them uncritically. Another minor observation is that many of the recommended resources and ideas within the *Classroom Implications* section of the eight *essentials* chapters have been around for decades (e.g., Drop Everything and Read, Literature Circle roles, K-W-L charts, Project Wild activities); and while one could describe them as ‘tried and true’, they would not strike an experienced educator as particularly innovative.

Finally, there were missed opportunities to present how technology can support second language teaching and learning, especially given that the authors included a chapter for that very purpose. To be fair, the book was published before the global pandemic changed the digital landscape, resulting in an ever-expanding range of digital resources for teachers. While the authors did refer to WhatsApp, Google Hangouts and YouTube, they did not describe, for example, how the various apps available for several years now within G-Suite (Google Docs, Slides, Forms, Jamboards) allow for the kind of collaboration and community building that is central to CLT principles.

Despite these observations, perhaps the book’s greatest strength, in addition to its comprehensive look at the eight *essentials*, is its commitment to teachers across all levels. This is evident in the approach taken to structuring the work, as well as the focus on classroom strategies. Too many teacher education books written by scholars seem to alienate the practitioners in their haste to buttress their arguments with an overabundance of academic studies. This book, while presenting solid theoretical foundations, never forgets its intended audience, and for that reason, among others identified above, this is a worthwhile read, particularly for novice teachers.