



***A Short Course in Teaching Reading: Practical Techniques for Building Reading Power 2nd ed. (2011)***

Beatrice S. Mikulecky

Pearson Education

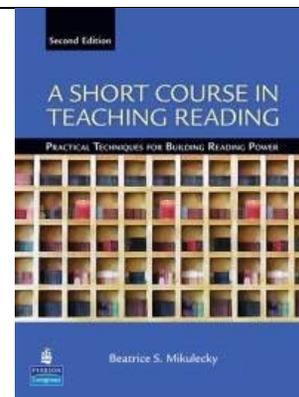
Pages 264

ISBN: 978-0-13-136385-4

Cost: \$65.31

*Reviewed by Hakan Demiröz*

Cumhuriyet University, Turkey hakandemiroz@gmail.com



*A Short Course in Teaching Reading* focuses on teaching reading effectively to ESL (English as a Second Language), EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students, the students whose home language is not “mainstream” Standard English, students with language processing disabilities, “non-mainstream” students in junior or community colleges, and adult native speakers of English in literacy centers and adult basic education classes. With an aim to bridge the gap between theory and practice, Mikulecky (2011) first provides an overview of reading theory, and the role of extensive reading on effective reading, and then focuses on practical techniques for teachers and prospective teachers of reading who want to develop their students’ effective reading skills. The author presents a list of reading skills which are research driven and devotes an important part of the book to teaching these skills effectively with plentiful sample exercises. She suggests that reading is not only encoding and decoding but meaning making from a text interactively. She does not consider reading as a mere psycholinguistic process, but she is well aware that reading is closely linked with brain processing, literacy and culture.

*A Short Course in Teaching Reading* is organized in three parts. The first part of the book focuses on primarily what reading is, its models, and definitions. To provide a clear understanding of the process of reading, the author synthesizes the findings of the previous research in psycholinguistics, cognitive psychology, vocabulary learning, and physiology. Then, the author also defines “literacy” and presents the connections between reading and literacy. Next, she emphasizes the cultural dimensions of literacy which should be considered in teaching reading effectively. She puts that oral language is the basis of literacy and the attitudes of the society to literacy shapes the way how literacy is used. She also explicates that discursal traditions, narrative structures, and the role and responsibilities of readers are shaped by cultures. She also supports Heath’s (1984) distinction between literacy skills which are encoding and decoding and the literate skills that are culturally influenced thinking processes about reading and writing. Finally, she lists the recommendations of educational researchers and what students should do in order to be a good reader in English.

The second part of the book concentrates on extensive reading which is beneficial to students (Day, & Bamford, 1998). The author first discusses what extensive reading is and how it is beneficial to the students. Extensive reading, which is an approach with a focus on reading for pleasure and quantity of reading and getting meaning without a mere focus on getting linguistic details unlike intensive reading, is the reading activity which is done by the students

at their own pace wherever they want; in class, at home, and around town. Then, she explains what students can read for extensive reading by suggesting two comprehensive lists of fiction and nonfiction readers: One for English language learners and the other for native speakers of English. The author also presents practical activities that can be implemented in the classroom for extensive reading such as book conferences, peer conferences, book response forms, book presentations and book circles, which are techniques that could help teachers have their students not only to become better readers by fostering a good reading habit but also to improve their language skills in the long run. Finally, she concisely explains why extensive reading is successful. All in all, the second part of the book emphasizes the important role of extensive reading in students' overall effective reading skills.

The last but the most comprehensive part of the book, which focuses on teaching reading skills with eight sections, provides a rationale and methodology behind teaching reading skills to the learners with teaching strategies and plentiful sample exercises that model how to put into practice that particular strategy. In the first section, she introduces reading skills which are defined as the cognitive processes that a reader uses in making sense of a text. This section gives an overview of why the skills are significant and why they should serve as the basis of the lessons. Then, she emphasizes the distinction between cognition and metacognition, and the importance of interactive and skill-focused lessons. This section provides teachers with substantial information on how to plan reading lessons, the role of the teacher, and how to sequence activities in skill-focused reading lessons. The following seven sections are devoted to highlight how to teach the grouped reading skills through teaching strategies which are clearly exemplified with abundant sample exercises. The skills are categorized, as Mikulecky suggests, according to their primary role in reading development. In these seven sections of the third part of the book, the author presents "Sample Rationale" of the skill that is in hand with vivid and convincing examples in a simple box. They can be used by teachers before starting to teach the specific skill. Another significant strategy of the third part of the book is that it presents "Suggested Intensive Reading Lessons" which serve as instructions for reading teachers who will teach the reading skills as a whole-class activity. The sample exercises provided in the sections seem to be helpful for both novice and experienced teachers. Mikulecky not only encourages reading teachers to use these exercises as models but also warns them to adapt the exercises considering their students' interests, abilities, and goals. It should be noted that one of the sections of this part is devoted to vocabulary building through reading. In this section, the book clearly emphasizes teaching high frequency words. She presents how new vocabulary can be taught through both intensive and extensive reading. She provides the teachers with strategies for teaching unknown vocabulary while reading and strategies for choosing and learning new words from reading materials. In short, third part of the book is a well-organized illustration of teaching reading skills to students.

After the three parts of the book, the author added five appendices, a bibliography, and an index of authors cited and key terms and concepts. The first appendix presents a brief review of the skill-focused methodology of the short course in teaching reading, the reasons why teachers and students should read aloud, the importance of cloze procedure and its activities, and the role of schemata. In the second appendix, she provides English phonemes and their common spellings as they have a crucial role in developing fluent reading. The next appendix consists of two high frequency word lists which are essential part of vocabulary teaching through reading. Before the last appendix which is answer key for exercises in the book comes a concise table of common collocations in academic texts.

One of the most important aspects of this book is that it provides "implications for teaching" that generally follows theoretical explanations along with the research findings. In these concise parts, the author presents research implications that should be put in practice in the reading course. Another important aspect of the book is that it provides a lot of well-

prepared sample exercises which can be exploited with or without adaptation in a wide variety of contexts of reading instruction. These activities may add variety to their lessons as different genres of reading texts are exploited as reading texts for a particular skill; for example, skimming a book review, a magazine article, and a website. Teachers are provided with well-introduced sample rationales for skills, directions for activities that can be used by teachers, and practical strategies for intensive reading lessons. In short, with its content and presentation, the book builds a bridge between theory and practice by using a skill-focused methodology to reading.

However, there are some shortcomings that need to be addressed. First, the book is printed in black and white which limits the readers of the book in getting a vivid understanding of the pictures, diagrams, boxes, and charts. The sample exercises could have been designed as photocopiable materials. Thus, they would be more helpful to the intended audience of the book.

To conclude, as a researcher interested in EFL reading, a university-level L2 reading teacher, and a teacher educator, I believe that it is a great book for novice teachers and teachers who want to improve their teaching skills and their students' effective reading skills. Therefore, I recommend this book as a self-study material to both novice and experienced reading teachers who are eager to further their teaching skills and add to the variety of their classroom activities, and I recommend it as a reference book to teacher educators who teach how to teach reading as well.

#### REFERENCES

- Day, R., & Bamford, J. (1998). *Extensive reading in the second language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1177/003368829802900211
- Heath, S. B. (1984). Literacy or literate skills: Considerations for ESL/EFL learners. In *On TESOL 84*, P. Larson, E. L. Judd, & D. S. Messerschmitt (eds.). Washington, DC: TESOL.