

Pamphlet Series from the International Reading Association

authors: various

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By Nevin Siders, Private ELT Consultant and Editor of the MEXTESOL Newsletter

This "book review" of International Reading Association titles of interest to foreign language teachers is a bit offbeat, looking at a series of free pamphlets. We could gather them into three groups: the three directed toward classroom teachers, the three written for parents in general, and the two policy statements aimed at the general public.

teacher research

Starting closest to home, the first three brochures foment teacher research, often called "action research" in EFL literature. "Getting Started on Teacher Research" by Van Tassel offers a general overview and answers the basic questions of where to begin. The second, titled "Methods of Data Collection for Teacher Research" by Donoahue explains in everyday language some of the nuts and bolts of the *how*: accepted variations on recording and transcribing. Once you are finished, you may want to explain to others what you learned, in which case "Caring to Share: Ways for Teachers to Share Their Research" by Dillard and Bintz will come in handy.

for parents

Three pamphlets for parents were written both in English and in Spanish. These contain encouraging ideas and tips so that parents may become involved in their children's summer reading, television watching and Internet use. Simple without being simplistic, these present several of those neat ideas we learned in basic teacher training, such as read the story before watching a program with that same story, "surfing" with a purpose, making an adventure of the library visit, discussing afterward, moderation as a key, and so on. The Internet pamphlet also explains some basic terminology, lists several sites linked to reading, an e-mail pen pal site and travel safety.

Just as they are, these would be wonderful adjuncts for parents with children in any language course. I would equally recommend the Spanish versions in any Spanish-speaking country, but especially for Mexico; they were written in solid Mexican Spanish, not "Spanglish", "U.S. Spanish", "Espan-glés", or whatever you may want to call it.

position statements

The position statements are on the topic of phonics and phonemics – a theme highly political in the United States which often resurges in other English-speaking countries. “The Role of Phonics in Reading Instruction” takes head-on the debates over sound-symbol relationship and whether teachers are successful. The third point in this pamphlet couples with the task-based approach: “Phonics instruction, to be effective in promoting independence in reading, must be embedded in the context of a total reading/language arts program.” The other position statement, “Phonemic Awareness and the Teaching of Reading” by the IRA’s Board of Directors explains to parents and legislators that phonemic awareness is “the best single predictor of successful reading acquisition” among young children”.

The usefulness of the two IRA position statements cannot be underestimated for practitioners of the task-based approach or whole language.

Conclusion

These brief brochures are of high interest to teachers and parents. Remember that single copies are free if you send them an already-addressed envelope and a stamp; dozens or hundreds are extremely inexpensive.

The latter two groups are also of interest to MEXTESOL for two reasons. As a professional association we have things to say to the parents of our students and to educational policy-makers. They may serve as models for position statements of our own on the teaching of English. We could publish drafts with similar advice for our students and their parents, for instance on how to take advantage of Internet both at home and in school, now that it is becoming widely available, while dispelling some of the fears.

Recommendation: Get these and read them. IRA brochures and books can be ordered on-line: *bookstore.reading.org*.