

Collaborative Professional Development, the Role of EIL, and CL Moving Beyond the Classroom

Prof. Jack C. Richards, University of Sydney

Professor Richards is one of the pinnacles of our field, including second and foreign communicative language teaching, linguistics, teacher training, and materials design. His Interchange and New Interchange coursebook and workbook series, among others, have been liferafts in the rough seas facing both new and experienced teachers since the mid-nineties. Professor Richards will be presenting in two sessions at KOTESOL's International Conference 2023, and it's an honor he has agreed to this interview, previewing his April conference talks as well as discussing other current trends in language teaching.

The English Connection (TEC): It's a pleasure to be in contact with you, Professor Richards, and thank you for agreeing to this interview with KOTESOL's *The English Connection* magazine. Your plenary session at KOTESOL's International Conference 2023, and other sessions, will be your first participation in an international conference since the pandemic. What an honor for KOTESOL and our members. Thank you!

In your plenary you will be discussing collaborative professional development (CPD), a topic also appearing in the recent Autumn edition of *The English Connection*. What aspects of CPD will you bring to light in your session?

Prof. Richards: I will discuss different dimensions of CPD (teacher training versus teacher development, institutional versus individual professionalism, and formal versus informal learning), describe examples of different CPD initiatives and the facilitating or inhibiting factors that influence the outcomes of CPD.

TEC: To briefly touch upon your invited second session, you will be reviewing the nature of English as an international language, including the need to revise such popular concepts as "native English speaker," "communicative competence," "ESL," and "EFL." What can interested attendees expect in this intriguing presentation?

Prof. Richards:

In this session, I will review the consequences of the spread of English as an international language and the issues it raises for determining targets and standards for the use of English, the role of culture in EIL, the nature of intercultural competence, and the impact EIL has on many of the decisions English teachers need to make.

TEC: No doubt much of this terminology revision can be related to the concept of English medium instruction (EMI), the topic of your recent book *Teaching and Learning in English Medium Instruction* [with Jack Pun], (Routledge,



▲ Prof. Richards at an Iranian TESOL Conference in 2014.

2022). Wouldn't this be a context native English teachers create naturally on day one in their career?

Prof. Richards: Not really. EMI refers to the use of English to teach an academic subject (e.g., geography, science, economics) when both the lecturer and the students may have restricted proficiency in English. Assessment is based on mastery of academic content rather than on use of English.

In an English class by comparison, while lessons do include content (e.g., sports, fashion, movies), content is a vehicle for the learning of English. Assessment is based on use of English rather than mastery of content, and the teacher is a language teacher rather than a content specialist.

TEC: Moving on to a different topic, I personally found, in the early days of my teaching career, the *Interchange* series to be a god-send: easily accessible, not requiring much prep, a multi-syllabus content of short, fast-paced tasks, and a perfect blend of communicative student activities and teacher-led instruction. How has the *Interchange* series been able to stand the test of time, so to speak?



▲ **The Interchange series (Cambridge University Press), now in its 5th edition.**

Prof. Richards: The series is now in its fifth edition, and each new edition addresses suggestions made by teachers around the world and an updating of the design and content of the books as well as the incorporation of new digital resources. However, the feedback we get from teachers and students is fairly consistent: "Teachers and students like it, it is very user-friendly, and it works!" If this were not the case it would not still be popular today, while many competitive titles have come and gone.

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TEC: As a follow-up question, what methods or strategies, if any, might be added into communicative language teaching (CLT), in light of more current research and technology since the mid-90s, when *Interchange* first appeared?

Prof. Richards: What has changed is that the context for communicative language use has moved beyond the classroom. Students develop their language through using English for social media, watching movies, and making use of digital resources and the internet. However, to be able to use English in this way, students need to have achieved a threshold level of proficiency in English. This is what classroom-based teaching as well as textbooks and their components aim to achieve: to develop the resources students need to acquire to be able to learn English beyond the classroom.

TEC: What are your thoughts on translation apps, or on the use of translation more generally in language teaching?

Prof. Richards: One of the legacies of the Direct Method in the 1920s and 1930s was the view that students could understand classroom English "directly" without the need for translation, given appropriate teaching materials and instruction. Translation has often been discredited since then, particularly in contexts where teachers do not speak the students' first language. In more recent times, applied linguists have reconsidered how translation can be used as a learning resource, and we see this reflected in the range of novel and often useful translation-based apps and resources students can now make use of.

TEC: Having published over 150 books and articles on language teaching, in addition to multiple coursebooks, what advice would you offer to new teachers, and textbook and online materials developers?

Prof. Richards: I would suggest asking, "What could I contribute that could make a difference and that would address the needs of teachers and learners?" Publishers of course are always looking for content developers who can bring something original and useful to the marketplace. However, due to the nature of the publishing industry today, there is a tendency to seek to do away with authors and royalties and to develop new resources in-house or through the use of fee-based freelance writers, something that was not the case when I first became active in materials' development.

TEC: Thank you, Professor Richards, for taking the time to discuss your experiences, as well as some of your recent research areas. I, and I'm sure all KOTESOL members, will be looking forward to your multiple presentations at the International Conference April 29–30.

Interviewed by Andrew White.