

## Book Review

*The Self Directed Teacher: Managing the Learning Process.* David Nunan & Clarice Lamb, Cambridge University Press. 296pp.

By Gerry Mugford, Universidad de Guadalajara

Effective teaching is principled, directed, reflective and aimed at promoting effective learning. Effective teaching is the result of an understanding of the relevant issues in the classroom and not just a ragbag of personal preferences, immediate charm and the latest fads. This is achieved by identifying the classroom processes that allow language knowledge to become an opportunity for language in use. Teaching therefore needs to examine the process of learning rather than the 'product' of teaching which leads to the title of this book: *The Self-Directed Teacher: Managing the Learning Process*. The purpose of the book is to study 'effective management of teaching and learning processes in second and foreign language classrooms' (p. 1). Besides being thoroughly conversant with classroom techniques and classroom practice, teachers need to develop themselves as professionals capable of taking conscientious and circum-spect decisions in the classroom:

If effective teaching requires high-level cognition, based on comprehension, reasoning, transformation and reflection... teaching performance should have an intellectual basis rather than a merely behavioral one, then concepts of self-direction and autonomy should be at the center of both pre- and inservice teacher education programs. (p. 112)

In this book, David Nunan and Clarice Lamb call for an effective classroom learning context which combines both high- and low-structured teaching, reflecting a principled and flexible sharing of classroom control between teachers and students.

The declared aim of the book is to 'help less experienced teachers develop their own distinctive teaching style, and prompt more experienced teachers to reflect on and refine theirs. In this way, all teachers might be ultimately self-directed' (p. xiii). Teachers need to take control of the learning process through informed decision-making and coping with problems on-line (p. 2).

The book is organised into eight chapters which, while following a line of thought from curriculum and methodology through to affective issues and

evaluation, can be used at will. After each chapter, the authors have developed a series of 'projects' which can be used as the basis for action research in the classroom.

The authors place heavy emphasis on classroom preparation in terms of previous reflection and thinking about lesson planning, classroom interaction patterns, teacher and student roles and instructional groups, stating that 'an effective language class must be assembled long before teachers and students come together in the classroom' (p. 43). This pre-assembly needs to focus on teacher knowledge and beliefs, an understanding of learner needs and achievable goals and objectives (p. 53).

The authors cover the ground that they set themselves to cover, using the existing classroom context as a starting point rather than trying to idealise what 'teaching' should be all about. Language teaching is about using the resources available, including time, to produce the best possible results under the circumstances.

Far from rejecting traditional models of teaching and embracing communicative approaches, the authors call for principled judgements from teachers. They examine the balance between functioning in another language and attempting to learn the foreign language (p. 16).

In focusing on key issues such as lesson planning, discipline mixed-level groups, motivation, the authors recognise classroom realities, for instance, that teachers only have a certain amount of time whether it is for lesson planning (p. 53) or that some students don't want to be in the language classroom in the first place (p. 126).

However, due to the ambitious and all-embracing task the authors set themselves, some sections are surprisingly short and could be developed much more, including use of the first language in the classroom (p. 98) and instructions (p. 96).

## **Evaluation**

This book represents a departure from the often self-centred world of ELT and analyses wider issues such as learner-centredness, self-directed learning and general education. It doesn't present neat quick answers which provide instant solutions for the classroom.

... context and situation, encoding student needs and curricular objectives need to be taken into consideration in managing the learning process. Blanket statements such as "increased wait time" and "avoid display questions" are simplistic, misleading, and just plain wrong in many situations. (p. 93)

One of the strongest aspects of the book is the examination of such issues as cross-cultural aspects of classroom management which can result in 'a mismatch between the roles and expectations of the teacher and those of the learners' (p. 112). In discussing cross-cultural aspects, the authors focus on student participation, management of content and 'management of face.' With regard to face, the authors point to four 'rights': The right to contribute the right not to contribute, the right to acceptance of the form of one's contribution and the right to acceptance of the content of one's contribution (p. 114),

For teachers facing serious problems of discipline, the authors refrain from giving bland statements about discipline. Instead, Nunan and Lamb tackle discipline head-on discussing how behavioural problems can be reduced before the teacher gets into the classroom.

Obviously the book is an invitation to further learning and research especially with practical sections such as mixed-level groups, one-to-one instruction and self-directed learning. Another strength of this book is that it covers topics often forgotten in similar books such as using the teacher's manual which busy teachers either ignore or just consult for answers but rarely to try to understand the course book author's underlying reasoning and philosophy behind the textbook.

This book is a valuable resource for further reflection and self-development as a teacher. It's a pity that certain sections are not even longer. But at 296 pages, some sections have to be brief.