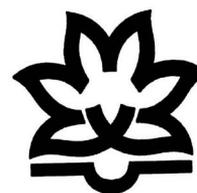




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(Book Review)



Urmia University

Learning Teaching: The Essential Guide to English Language Teaching (third ed.), Jim Scrivener. Macmillan, Oxford (2011). 416 pp., ISBN: 978-0-230-72982-7.

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Learning Teaching, a monograph by Jim Scrivener, a reassuring writer and an experienced teacher, is part of a series of Macmillan books for teachers. “The book is primarily aimed at teachers starting out on a training course or in their first year or two of work” (p. 8), but still teachers can find something interesting in it whatever their level of experience. This new edition (third edition) has been expanded, revised and updated in line with current developments in methodology and practice. The bonus with the third edition is the attached DVD full of wonderful and novel teaching ideas and activities which confirming the author’s position, brilliantly merge theory with practice. The reviewers of the current work themselves have tried its photocopiable activities and experienced its well-worked mechanisms in their classes. Though, at first, it may seem a bit wordy, in an age with a good number of books on teaching English, this one stands out from the crowd by providing intellectually-engaging texts. In addition to introduction, the book consists of 16 chapters, answers to tasks, some key terminology, further reading as well as an index.

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A general introduction to ways of working in a language classroom and some milestone concepts open the book's discussion through the first chapter, *Starting Out*. Four classroom snapshots followed by comments in this chapter challenge the readers with the type of classroom at work and set the scene for mapping the teachers' role in the next section. Here, the author distinguishes three kinds of teachers, namely: 'the explainer', 'the involver', and 'the enabler'. The third, Scrivener believes, is the aim of his book: to bring up teachers who not only know about the subject matter and methodology but also have an awareness of how individuals and groups think and feel within their classes. To the end of this chapter, some hints and strategies are outlined to make the first lessons more fruitful. The reviewers found this part extremely impressive, full of ideas one may know as a professional but taken for granted!

The second chapter, *Classroom Activities*, looks at the requirements to be considered when planning and running an activity, which would be a great help for the ones new to the field of teaching. Engaging the reader with the material, the thought-provoking tasks provided in between the texts make the act of reading a two-way process which makes the reader-author interaction possible.

Chapter 3, *Classroom Management*, deals with a hot topic in teaching. The author guides the teachers through the main concepts in managing the teaching environment while answering the most common questions raised for teachers including 'how to give clear instruction', 'how to get the learners' attention', and 'how to use the board more effectively'. Very interestingly, Scrivener also reminds the reader of some popular techniques they may use, of course unintentionally, to prevent learning. Most of the teacher readers here, to their surprise, find themselves guilty of committing some of them such as talking more than what is needed, over-helping/over-organizing, being over-polite, and so many other hindering techniques.

Chapter 4, *Who Are the Learners*, keeps up with the recent requirements in ELT for learner centered approaches. Here, the author encourages the teachers to be open to their students' feedback and not to fear negative comments about their teaching; "the more they avoid it, the more dangerous it becomes, because ungiven feedback piles up like floodwater behind a dam" (p.95).

Chapter 5, *Language Analysis*, is a basic introduction to analyzing language. No matter how little you know about grammar, this section will help you analyze the required points for your teaching. This chapter is highly associated with chapter 7 where the practical methods and techniques are offered for teaching grammar. The reviewers wonder why these chapters are not following each other. As a fundamental skill for a teacher, thinking about the aims of the lesson and planning for it are of the mysterious and hard-to-be-done jobs for the novice teachers. However, Scrivener helps you to get rid of the frustration you may feel in doing so through the step by step explanations provided in chapter 6, *Planning Lessons and Courses*.

Chapters 7 up to 11 encompass bright ideas on teaching different components or skills of language, namely: teaching grammar, lexis, speaking and writing, listening and reading, and phonology. One of the strange things you may encounter in this book is that productive skills precede receptive skills; this, indeed, runs contrary to what the theory proposes as regards the natural flow of learning. Chapter 12, *Focusing on Language*, offers insightful comments about errors and their correction; then it moves on to discuss assessment and testing. Considering errors an evidence for progress, Scrivener puts emphasis on self-correction rather than error correction by the teacher.

As an English teacher, one might come across different types of classes such as ESP (English for Specific Purposes), EAP (English for Academic Purposes), Business Courses, Young Learners, or classes aimed at exam preparation. *Teaching Different*

Classes, chapter 13, equips one with the worked and well-found techniques to teach these and other similar classes properly.

Nothing is skipped from the general scope of this book; even for online and virtual learning there are some suggestions in Chapter 14, *Using Technology*. The author introduces many novel ideas regarding recent technologies and how to make them at the service of your teaching. There are suggestions for teaching all four language skills using new popular technologies such as computers, interactive whiteboards, and so on. Especially for teachers having teenage learners, this chapter would be an informative resource to add spice of novelty to their teaching and create up-to-date atmosphere which is highly appreciated by juveniles.

The most interesting part is chapter 15, *Tools, Techniques, Activities*, where one can learn many activities to fill the spare of moment s/he has to the end of his/her class. This chapter is rich with many types of fillers and novel activities easily run in the class. Even if one is new to a class, this chapter has many ideas to make him/her familiar with his/her students and to feel at ease with them and make them feel so with 'getting to know you' activities. The readers will find the activities very useful to liven up their lessons. The ideas would make a difference between a boring, always the same teaching procedure, and an interesting, lively, fruitful one. What adds to the strength of this volume is the author's position in taking the realities of the classroom to consideration, that is to say, the ideas are not from another planet, or they do not seem too good to be true, rather they are plausible. Being a "toolkit of possibilities" (p. 8) is highly reflected through the practices recorded in the attached DVD.

Though you may be a little confused at the end of the book finding out that you were reading chapter 15 but now it is finished and you have not come across chapter 16, do not worry! You have finished reading it since chapter 16; unfortunately, it does not have a heading. At the end of this section, you will find yourself motivated to rethink your teaching and you will find ways to get rid of the boredom you may

feel of the repeated act of teaching. The book closes its discussion with the answers to the tasks and a reference guide for some key terminology employed throughout the book.

As one may infer, as any human product, this book also has some drawbacks. To mention a few, although the author positively compacts general ideas regarding teaching from different angles, brief discussions seem short and inadequate in some cases. For instance, the section on ESP and EAP is rather too general and short for a person new to these concepts. The reviewers also wonder why the help index in the 2nd edition is excluded from its third edition; the help index made the surfing through the book easier and faster. Notwithstanding, the above mentioned points should not overshadow the strength of this volume.

All in all, if you are new to the realm of language teaching, be sure that you can take up this gold mine of tips and go to your first class with enough knowledge and confidence to run your class. Scrivener has done a good job in collecting an essential guide not only for a novice trainee teacher with little or no experience of teaching but also for a more experienced teacher looking for the latest developments in language teaching. It is also an invaluable resource for teacher training courses. It seems like a teaching handbook, or even a bible which the novice teacher can carry and refer to at every moment s/he confronts a problem in teaching. The reader-friendly, simple, and easy to understand layout of the book, the author's offering of his personal experience, novel and practical activities are but a few of the outstanding features of this must-have. In a nutshell, this book is highly recommended if you do not want to be just another teacher but one of the best, are eager to find "immediately-usable practical techniques" (p. 7) and tired of reading books which offer tempting, idealistic, and not practical solutions.