Learning and Teaching English: A Course for Teachers

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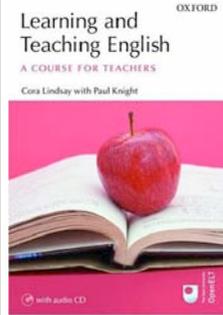
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Learning and Teaching English: A Course for Teachers is designed for novice English language teachers and those interested in furthering their own learning in the field. It claims as its audience those teaching young children, young adults and adults.

The nine chapters of the book cover the principles of English Language Teaching and include topics such as the language learning process and teaching implications, teaching methods, the nature of the English language, the four skills, planning, and assessment and evaluation. Within these topics the teacher educator can create many opportunities for her students to practice speaking, listening, reading and writing skills, particularly during pre- and post-stages of the lesson. Each chapter offers several optional activities, with an answer key, that allow the reader to explore and analyse the ideas presented in the chapters. Assembling a portfolio, containing both the students' and the teacher's work, is encouraged by the authors as a means for the teacher to reflect on her or his own learning and teaching practice.

Following the assessment chapter are nine useful case studies drawing on interviews with practicing teachers from around the world. Questions in a format similar to the Teacher Knowledge Test (see TKT Cambridge ESOL) are provided after each case. Following the cases is a section on classroom language, which includes a range of classroom-interaction types. There is also a glossary of key ELT terms and a list of further reading for those wishing to explore the book's topics in greater depth. These two components alone make Lindsay and Knight's book a useful resource for English language students, teachers and teacher educators from a variety of backgrounds.

I piloted this book in a 60 contact hour ESP/TESOL Methods class offered at Zayed University, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, over a 20 week period. The class consisted of 15 local female Emirati undergrads specializing in English language teaching for grades 3 -9. This review draws heavily on my evaluation of Learning and Teaching English as one of several key class texts for the course.

The book's layout is generally user friendly; however, there is limited visual support. Thus teacher educators using the book may find it necessary to address this, depending on their students' motivation, needs, and learning styles.

One of my course's learning goal's was to develop teacher trainees' communicative competence in ELT and to further fine tune their application of various teaching strategies: effective teaching and assessment of (1) the four skills, (2) integrating those skills, (3) grammar and (4) vocabulary, all for grades 3-9. The book was effective in providing a useful recap of the ways we learn language, what makes a good language learner, the integral nature of teaching, learning and assessment, and a brief overview of five of the major teaching methods that have influenced ELT today. The activities based on these topics generated much discussion and debate and provided many opportunities for the class to practice their own language accuracy and fluency.

The "Language" chapter focuses on English from the smallest components to written and spoken genres. The focus then moves to ways teachers can facilitate learners' understanding and use of the language. The phonological features of English whilst addressed briefly needed further exploration and practice for the class I was teaching. More attention to word and sentence stress, intonation, and especially features of connected speech would have benefited this group of undergraduate colleagues whose first language is not English.

I then asked colleagues to implement some of the activities from the four- skills' chapters. The majority commented that they felt the need to modify the book's suggested activities to ensure a more collaborative-learning approach to their teaching. In addition, colleagues felt they needed to specifically address appropriate activity sequencing. For example, in Chapter 5 colleagues thought there was a need to practice pre-listening and listening-for-gist-and-main-ideas tasks before the specific focus on details such as "words and sounds you hear" in Activity 2 or "fillers" in Activity 4. In addition, the useful contrast of characteristics of spoken and written language in Activity 3 may have been better placed directly following "identifying situations in which we speak" (Activity 1).

The Drills section in the "Speaking" chapter was extremely useful and encouraged us to supplement it with microteaching emphasizing intonation and features of connected speech.

In Chapter 6, "Reading", more activities such as Activity 5 asking readers to identify the microskills of reading would allow those readers to analyse and apply the necessary staging of skills-based lessons. Colleagues felt that the "Reading for young learners" section needed to address phonics and phonetics explicitly and provide opportunities for discussing whole language and phonics. This lack prompted us to supplement the section with activities based around the teaching of literacy, phonics and sight reading.

Chapter 7, "Writing", provided useful guidelines on the writing process, the microskills of writing, and implementing effective writing lessons. Again, examples and further exploration of the staging of writing lessons would have strengthened this chapter. Colleagues suggested that their learners needed to read, understand, and analyse models of the texts they would be expected to create in order to practice writing collectively and then individually. Teachers ensuring their student writers' understand models might counteract the typical trend of many teachers in this region: to encourage their learners to memorize texts (for the exams).

Chapter 8, "Planning", provided useful suggestions for current best practice in ELT preparation and planning. The "Assessment and Evaluation" chapter stressed summative assessment. Further strategies for formative assessment apart from the portfolio would strengthen this chapter, especially for those teachers not working with Cambridge, IELTS or TOEFL testing schemes.

I asked colleagues to use the case studies as a basis for a final microteaching activity, either as a reading or listening lesson with the whole class. Here, they were expected to apply the pre-text, text and post-text staging suggested in the previous chapters and ensure that the first stage addressed gist, followed by main ideas and later details. This activity was challenging but particularly useful. Much discussion was generated as colleagues evaluated the effectiveness of Lindsay & Knight's "authentic" texts and tasks presented after each case. Someone suggested that the format be modified to ensure that different learning styles and intelligences (see Gardner, 1983) are included.

Lindsay and Knight's textbook/teacher resource offers a variety of effective strategies and useful examples for the English language teacher, models grounded in current classroom use. The material provides best practice ideas for new and developing teachers. Although it appears to be geared toward preparing certificate candidates for the CELTA or the Trinity CertTESOL, it offers much for an audience of trainee and developing teachers looking to enhance their own professional learning.

References

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