

## Book Reviews

JOANN MILLER, UNIVERSIDAD DEL VALLE DE MÉXICO

---

*David Vale with Anne Feunteum. Teaching Children English: A Training Course for Teachers of English to Children. Cambridge University Press, 1995. 180 pp.*

One of my dreams as a teacher trainer used to be of finding a textbook that would do everything for me. Most textbooks designed for teacher training have interesting readings and often creative activities for the trainees to do, but I had never found a book that included ideas written directly for the trainer with information on how to present and demonstrate the material in the training class. This was always the trainer's responsibility--and it often meant hours of preparation for each class hour.

*Teaching Children English* is an answer to a teacher trainer's dreams. The text is divided into two parts: *Part One*, the *Training Course*, includes activities, reading texts and discussion questions for the trainees and *Part Two*, the *Trainer's Notes*, provides the trainer with general guidelines and step-by-step notes and recommendations on how to present the material in class.

The text is designed to function in many ways. It can be used by a trainer working with groups of teachers--the trainees use *Part One*, while the trainer makes use of the *Trainer's Notes*. The text can also be used by teachers studying on their own. Here the teachers read both parts. In a self-access situation, teachers are encouraged to discuss and share ideas with their colleagues. This, in reality, would lead us to a fourth function not mentioned in the text--the possible use of the text in a group situation in which a group of in-service teachers would work through the material on their own--sharing and contributing as they grew.

The textbook can be used with three different kinds of teachers: those with EFL experience, but with no experience working with children; those with experience teaching children, but with little or no experience teaching EFL; and those who are still training to teach EFL and who have little or no practical experience.

The text consists of ten units, each treating a specific aspect of methodology. It is based on “a *theme-based approach* for the *task content* of each unit. In other words, each unit contains *stories, rhymes, songs, practical tasks* and *language tasks*, etc. related to a specific theme--which illustrates the methodology and classroom practice issues in question.” (p. 1)

An example of this *whole-language, cross-cultural* approach can be seen in the outline of a couple of units:

Unit	Study area	Tasks include
3	Building up a teaching sequence: an overview of two approaches	Potatoes: using a story as the central point of a unit-- <i>The Giant Potato</i> : storytelling potato games potato (puppet) role play language development related to the story potato bingo potato chant
8	Visuals and other teaching aids	Festivals/special days/Hallowe'en activities: making <i>festival</i> visual aids and using them masks, lanterns witch rhymes/ <i>Winnie the Witch</i> casting a spell illustrated lesson plans

The authors describe the *activity-based* approach in one of the first readings (“Teaching English to children--an activity based approach”, Unit 2):

Language activities for the sake of teaching language alone have little place in the children’s classroom. For example, it makes little sense to ask children *Can you see a boy and a girl in the picture? Can you fly?* where the purpose of these questions is merely to teach *can/can’t*. Children do not normally learn language one structure or six new words at a time. They are able to learn language whole, as part of a whole learning experience. It is the responsibility of teachers to provide this whole learning/whole language experience. Therefore, rather than impose a language-based course of study on young learners, where children are exposed only to small and predetermined chunks of language, it would seem to be of far more value to encourage children to acquire language through an activity-based curriculum. Such a curriculum can provide a language-rich *environment/input* for the child, while at the same time reflecting the actual interests and needs of the young learner. (p. 28)

The authors encourage teachers to devise lesson plans using topic webs such as this one from Unit 3 which deals with the topic *potatoes/vegetables* throughout the curriculum--in science, crafts, math, art, drama, history, etc.

(P. 236)

While obviously preferring the activity-based approach, the authors clearly state that they do not want “to **impose** a particular approach in [the] book. Therefore, all ideas or approaches contained within [the] book, however dogmatic in style, should be treated as points of reflection for teachers’ **own** beliefs. [They] want to encourage teachers to consider the relevance of their present teaching methods/approaches, as well as those included in the book, to the needs and interests of **their** pupils and **their** teaching situation.” (p. 3)

In order for us to see how this activity-based approach is used in the textbook to present ideas to the trainees, let’s look at a brief summary of the unit on *Visuals and teaching aids* (Unit 8) which is developed around the idea of Hallowe’en:

<i>Training Course (Part One)</i>	<i>Trainer's Notes (Part Two)</i>
8.1 A) <i>The witch is in the cave</i> --a game B) <i>Witch models</i> --a game	
8.2 Reading Tasks: <i>Visual Aids</i> Tasks	Instructions for use of reading and tasks; points to highlight
8.3 Planning for Hallowe'en preparation of topic web preparation of visuals	Instructions for guidance needed during the activity and as feedback
8.4 Practical tasks making a <i>concertina book</i> producing teaching/visual aids for Hallowe'en/festivals A. Preparation-Brainstorming B. Production-four aids C. Display and feedback	Hints for management and ideas for mak- ing the book  General hints
8.5 Reading Tasks: <i>Video</i> production of a promotional pamphlet for a good commercial EFL video	Suggestions for production of pamphlet
8.6 Round-up Activity: Spell competition	

In conclusion, *Teaching Children English* is a very good book for many different types of teachers. It could be very useful for teachers who are now teaching children and who would like to understand what *whole-language* teaching is really about and how to include these ideas in the classes. It could also be quite useful for teachers who are now using *whole-language* teaching techniques and who would like to see some new ideas for their classrooms. I think the book should also be of interest to teachers of adolescents and adults. Who can say that many of these *whole-language* ideas wouldn't also be useful at other age levels?