

David Nunan and Clarice Lamb. 1996. *The self-directed teacher: managing the learning process*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 296

The most recent volume to come out under the *Cambridge Language Edition* series lives up to the description of its publishers as 'drawing on the best available research and practice to present effective approaches to language teaching'. It focuses on the management skills required in classrooms that privilege learning and aim at being learner-centred.

Nunan and Lamb describe 'management' as 'creating a positive pedagogical environment which facilitates learning' (p.1). Consequently, they focus mainly on professional decisions and set out to provide teachers and teachers-in-training with knowledge and skills that will allow them to take control of teaching processes in their classrooms.

Five different kinds of material are integrated into the body of each chapter: input, classroom extracts, resources, tasks and projects. The book can be tackled in any order, but it would be advisable to read Chapter 1 first since this provides clear definitions of a number of core concepts used in the book. The authors advise that the final chapter should be read last.

Using the guidelines provided by Wong *et al.* (1992), Nunan and Lamb focus on all three dimensions of classroom management:

1. *Planning and preparation*
2. *Classroom strategy*
3. *Whole-school strategy*.

They see *classroom strategy* as of greatest importance. However, unlike Wong *et al.* they seriously doubt whether one can successfully predict and develop strategies for dealing with problems which **may** arise in the classroom. They consider it better to prevent problems from arising in the first place or to develop ways of dealing with problems as they arise.

Since they are convinced that decisions cannot be made in a vacuum, they provide extensive treatment of curricular issues in Chapter 1 (*A context for classroom action*). One of the most valuable parts of the book is the clear discussion of key terms such as learning-centredness, learner-centredness, self-directed teaching and communicative language teaching. I would consider the book worth purchasing for this chapter alone.

Nunan and Lamb reject a method-driven approach and allow for a range of roles for the teacher, making a firm distinction between the kinds of behaviour that different types of tasks make on the teacher and learner respectively.

Management decisions can be understood and dealt with in terms of the degree to which particular tasks require the balance of power to be handed from teacher to student. There are times - high-structure situations - when it is appropriate for power and control to be vested in the teacher. Low-structure tasks, however, require student initiative. The learning process is managed appropriately when both the teacher and students acknowledge and have skills to deal with the two situations.

Chapter 2 (*The planning process*) uses a two-dimensional framework or grid to show how decision-making is put into effect. In the next chapter, (*Classroom talk*), there is a strong focus on teacher talk within the dynamic of classroom interaction.

Chapter 4 (Classroom dynamics) offers teachers the means of dealing with four problems relating to pacing of tasks and activities, classroom monitoring, and ways of overcoming behaviour problems. It also explores two recent approaches to managing the learning process: using classroom practices typically used by effective teachers and reflective teaching. In both cases, they provide an accessible account of the nature and value of these rather different approaches. While the effective teachers movement encourages the use of certain techniques and strategies that have been tied to successful outcomes, reflective teaching encourages a willingness to continue to develop knowledge and theories of teaching in response to changing notions of learning and language.

South Africans will find the section on cross-cultural aspects of classroom management particularly useful. Nunan and Lamb use a task designed by Malcolm (1991:1) to demonstrate a mismatch between content, student participation and the management of face (i.e. the right to contribute or otherwise and the right to acceptance of both the form and the content of one's contribution). This provides the opportunity for a clear and systematic exploration of the implications of a shift from viewing activities from the teachers' perspective to that of the learners.

Chapter 5 (*Instructional groups*) examines a wide range of factors involved in setting up and managing learning groups. It highlights the crucial role of the personality and previous learning experiences of the teacher and students, and the expectations that they have about what is appropriate behaviour in the classroom. As so often proved to be the case in South Africa, problems emanate from the mismatch between learner and teacher expectations about their respective roles. By defining a possible set of problems Nunan and Lamb (p.134), help teachers to understand the problems and thus overcome them rather than rejecting a more self-directed role for teacher and pupil.

Another set of problems they identify arise from uncertainties on the part of learners as to the appropriate role they have to play in specific tasks. Here, as elsewhere in the book, they encourage teachers to ensure that learners have a clear idea of what is expected and have had an opportunity to develop appropriate competencies.

Chapter 6 (*Managing Resources*) offers practical guidelines on locating and using resources. Unfortunately, South Africans do not have the rich array of resources available to them that are detailed in this chapter. The most useful section, therefore is the one on using commercial

teaching materials. The evaluative questions and criteria provided should go a long way towards equipping teachers to adapt and use material.

Chapter 7 (*Affective issues in the language classroom*) is refreshingly realistic. Affective factors relating to classroom learning and the challenges involved in dealing with them effectively are often presented in simplistic terms. This chapter does not offer easy or universal solutions, but chooses instead to make readers aware of the complexities involved.

Finally Chapter 8 (*Monitoring and Evaluation*) does not pretend to be a comprehensive guide to monitoring and evaluation, but it does offer a good summary of some aspects, especially self-evaluation. (It is, of course, true too that the book includes evaluation activities in almost every chapter.) My criticism is that it rests rather too heavily on Rea-Dickins and Germaine (1995). South African readers looking for guidance on alternative assessment will find little on the topic.

Overall, this book makes an important contribution. Teacher educators will find its wide-ranging content invaluable in developing a curriculum for both pre-service and in-service courses. Ultimately, they must have as their goal the development of independent people who have the insight into the language learning process and the necessary skills to give effective direction in their classrooms.

References

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