

New Publications ... Nuwe Publikasies

Reviews

John Pearce

The Heart of English: Nine to Fourteen. Oxford: OUP, 1985. (124pp.)

This book was written for "teachers who find themselves teaching English without claiming a specialist competence in the subject" and aims at providing practical guidance in planning, developing, and organizing classroom work. Consequently, although Pearce has British teachers in mind, many South African teachers who lack confidence will welcome this book.

It is divided into three parts. The first part considers the reading curriculum and looks at ways of developing comprehension skills. These three chapters draw on recent research findings to define firstly what reading is, firmly establishing the importance of a dynamic view of reading which takes account of reading as a process of growing sophistication. Standard comprehension exercises are sharply criticised because of their limitations if understanding is seen as important. A vivid picture of alternative activities is given. However, although Pearce makes his points most convincingly, the illustrations given are unlikely to be directly useful to the South African teacher, who will have to choose passages which speak to his own pupils.

The section on reading goes on to suggest sensible ways in which skilful reading can be taught, employing cloze, prediction, sequencing and questions. Practical advice is given so the inexperienced teacher would have no difficulty in drawing up his own exercises. Finally, the section on reading explores ways in which children become fluent readers "able to range as widely in reading as their studies or hobbies may take them and as deeply in literature as their interests may lead".

The second section of the book is concerned with developing writing skills and ways of helping children towards a clearer sense of audience, register and mode. Teachers in training will find the distinctions made between various stages in the child's development most illuminating. Established teachers may find they have been emphasising 'correctness' when the child needs to "adopt

and engage with the style of written language". Chapter 5, which looks at ways of teaching writing, is particularly useful in offering suggestions which take the realities of the classroom into account. The chapters on spelling and punctuation are refreshingly bold suggesting the importance of establishing clear patterns rather than teaching long lists of spelling or studying analytic rules.

The third section deals with oral skills and the importance of integrating the various skills which constitute language study in an organized and balanced way. The present emphasis in South Africa on language across the curriculum makes this section particularly relevant. The final chapter in the book explores very briefly some related issues such as slow learners. While the discussion is necessarily rather superficial, it does provide a very useful orientation.

Pearce argues convincingly and readers will enjoy his clean style. Furthermore, his view of classroom activity is coldly realistic/refreshingly candid.

While the treatment of the teaching of English is not comprehensive, the book offers a rare combination of clear insight and practical guidance. It provides a rich store of ideas and forces the reader to re-examine established practices. Although those teaching English as a first language will gain most from the book, second language teachers will find much to interest them.

Those who find the book lacks depth of treatment will discover that the *Notes of references* direct them to works that offer more detailed examination of each of the topics discussed.

E. Ridge

Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson

Relevance: Communication and Cognition. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986. (279pp.)

Sperber and Wilson attempt to ground the study of human communication, and verbal communication in particular, on a general view of human cognition. There is an obvious similarity between their aims and that of Jackendoff, in his recent