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Review : Learning One-to-One

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Learning One-to-One

I. Wisniewska

Cambridge University Press 2010, £23.40

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Learning One-to-One by Ingrid Wisniewska is published by Cambridge University Press and is one of the latest books released in the Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers series. The accompanying CD-ROM supplies material related to particular activities suggested in the handbook, and is compatible with both Windows and Apple systems. In addition to these resources, supplementary worksheets are available online via the website of the publisher (www.cambridge.org/elt/learningonetooone). The handbook, with a total of 10 chapters, is split into two parts: Part 1 looks at the underlying principles of one-to-one teaching whereas Part 2 introduces engaging and interesting lesson ideas for the one-to-one context.

Part 1

The first five chapters of the handbook seek to introduce the one-to-one classroom and the role of the teacher. The chapters also offer suggestions for planning lessons and courses, provide ideas for selecting and adapting material, and aim to develop the skill of learning from feedback from the learner, including reflecting on previously taught lessons. Chapter One deals with the practice of one-to-one learning within the kinds of environments not necessarily associated with education but familiar to many EFL teachers (coffee shops, for example), as well as more traditional teaching contexts, and provides a good introduction for teachers unfamiliar with one-to-one teaching. Within Chapter Two, the author considers the different roles of the teacher during a one-to-one lesson. The roles which are highlighted include the following:

1. Conversation partner
2. Observer and listener
3. Feedback provider
4. Mentor and guide
5. Learner

The handbook goes into some detail explaining each role and the expected manners in which the teacher and learner will interact with suggested corresponding activities and lesson recipes within Part 2 of the handbook. Wisniewska encourages the teacher, as ‘conversation partner’, to raise their language level, ‘to provide challenge and opportunity to

learn' (Wisniewska, 2010, p.18). This adjustment of speech demonstrated is referred to as 'scaffolding' and can essentially assist learners to, 'produce utterances that they would not be able to produce on their own' (Ellis, 1997, p.48). This form of scaffolding is commonly related to Vygotsky's concept of the 'Zone of Proximal Development' (henceforth ZPD), 'where learners achieve the desired outcome' (Mitchell & Miles, 2004, p.196) with appropriate 'scaffolding' from the teacher providing what Wisniewska calls, 'a useful model for helping learners learn' (Wisniewska, 2010, p.18). The teacher's role as an 'observer and listener' suggests that he or she will provide the learner space so that the student's language can be monitored and material or the lesson can be adjusted appropriately. This role is loosely related to an unplugged approach with the teacher being more receptive with the learner as this promotes lessons, 'to be driven by their needs arising from their context of use' (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009, p.92).

Chapter Three focuses upon needs analysis, course design and lesson planning with material, such as questionnaires, example lesson plans, learning logs etc., available to incorporate with the accompanying CD-ROM. Within Chapter Four, 'Selecting and adapting materials', the handbook attempts to offer advice on lesson materials. Obviously, Wisniewska promotes the use of learner autonomy with some suggestions for 'learner-selected materials' and 'learner-generated materials'. In addition, there are some recommendations by Wisniewska on adapting authentic and published coursebook materials, as these predominantly rely upon pair and group work.

Chapter Five (the final chapter for Part 1), entitled 'Feedback and reflection', considers the use of teacher and learner self-evaluation with suggested material available on the CD-ROM. Wisniewska (2010) does acknowledge that, 'reflecting on your teaching ... will help you tailor your lessons to the needs of the student' (p.89) with recommendations to include some form of written feedback during the lesson. However, there are a number of methods available for teachers to reflect on their lessons not mentioned in the handbook, such as blogs, twitter, and recording the lesson. Most of what is focused upon in this book is based upon the student's feedback.

Part 2

The second part of the handbook (Chapters Six to Ten) suggests activities for one-to-one lessons based upon the roles of the teacher which were introduced earlier, such as communication partner, observer and listener. Each chapter is dedicated to a corresponding role for the teacher, with many lesson ideas and recipes available to print from the CD-ROM

as well as some activities that are adapted from other books with the author referencing sources. Towards the end of the handbook, the author offers suggested reading for a range of topics such as course design, feedback and learner autonomy, as well as suggested websites to include before, during or after formal one-to-one lessons. The majority of the lesson ideas/recipes suggested, support communicative and task-based activities in conjunction with the varying roles presented in the last five chapters in the handbook.

The handbook is written in a style appropriate for a range of teaching professionals to follow and is invaluable for teachers with limited or no previous experience of teaching one-to-one lessons. There are many activities suggested throughout which can be used immediately or adapted for other lessons. The handbook will instill confidence in teachers with limited one-to-one teaching experience and is a great reference point for those seeking ideas or the fundamental requirements for one-to-one lessons. The artwork within the book could be improved but the potential challenges of one-to-one teaching are explained with some ideas to create rewarding and engaging lessons. This handbook is an important guide for teachers who have little or no experience of teaching one-to-one and is suitable for teachers who are seeking to expand their current understanding of teaching, particularly in a challenging and demanding area of one-to-one teaching. There are some areas not included in the handbook which are now considered significant, such as the use of technology and learning in a one-to-one context; recording lessons with a dictaphone for students to refer to later, using Twitter to encourage learners to communicate with other learners or educators around the world, or encouraging students to use blogging as a form of self-reflection. This handbook can be used as a springboard for designing lessons and deserves a place on a teacher's bookshelf.

References

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Biodata

Martin Sketchley is a freelance English Language Teacher currently studying towards his MA in ELT at the University of Sussex. He runs occasional teacher training workshops related to technology and the classroom. He has been teaching EFL for over five years now, most of which has been in South Korea, and is currently a Cambridge ESOL Examiner for the FCE and BEC examinations. His blog, www.eltexperiences.blogspot.com, includes many book reviews and reflections on lessons, training and workshops