

Book Review

***What Should Every EFL Teacher Know?* Paul Nation. Tokyo: Compass Publishing, 2013. 235 pp.**

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In the introduction of *What Should Every EFL Teacher Know?*, Paul Nation writes about his extensive experience “training teachers of English for over forty years” in many non-native English countries (Nation, 2013, p. 6). Given his wealth of knowledge on EFL education, it comes as no surprise, then, that he has decided to write a kind of how-to book on the fundamentals of teaching EFL and on the ways to improve teacher and student development. The book is comprised of seventeen chapters, but it could be argued that the book is divided into two sections: half of the book is devoted to the teaching of particular language skills, whereas the other half focuses on how to deal with EFL classroom design, lesson planning, and student behavior. Throughout the book, however, is the notion that there are four key areas, or “strands” (p. 8), as the author puts it, which are essential components of any EFL course and that the techniques or activities in an EFL class or course should develop from one of these strands.

While the first half of the book addresses the EFL instructor as teacher and trainer of learners, the second half mainly considers the instructor as tester and planner. In the section on testing, Nation not only discusses what makes a good test but also what tests and record-keeping strategies

are recommended for language skills. In the view of this instructor, this section is invaluable as it serves as a good resource on valid/reliable tests from which feedback can be written. Moreover, the recommended tests (e.g. interviews, analytic marking) are, as I can attest from my own experience, easy to carry out and can be applied to students at a variety of levels.

The section on planning is divided into two parts: planning a lesson and planning a course. In the case of the former, Nation wants the reader to know how to plan a lesson, how much time should be allotted for each activity and each lesson, and how activities should be chosen with the aid of lesson plan examples. These plans are, in my judgment, well-balanced and provide an template that is easy to follow. However, they are somewhat teacher-centered and the schedule is tight. This may make it a challenge to complete all the activities planned for the lesson, especially for the novice instructor). But, just as importantly, Nation tells the reader – and shows with “a wide range of examples” – how to regularly modify activities within the lesson plan (p. 167). I believe this is an important step because while repetition of skills should be encouraged to build up the student’s confidence in that language skill area,

instructors should teach these skills in a variety of ways so as to maintain the student's interest.

As for planning a course, the book outlines the processes of curriculum and syllabus design, as they are integral to language course planning. For each type of design, Nation not only goes over their main parts, but also engages in some interesting debate. One debate related to syllabus design, for example, concerns the use of real materials in the classroom (pp. 184-185). From Nation's point of view, the use of real materials can be problematic for student development because the student may simply not know enough vocabulary, particularly as many of these may be relatively low-frequency words (p. 184). His point is that teachers should be wary of introducing authentic material. Students should not be exposed to a great deal of unfamiliar vocabulary all at once, except if the words from the real material are explained and defined beforehand, as the teacher may risk losing the student's interest in learning.

On the plus side, the book is consistent in presenting Nation's ideas in a way that even a novice teacher could appreciate. First, every chapter starts with a brief yet concise summary of the key points, and the four above-mentioned strands are mentioned to help categorize and assess proposed activities. Secondly, the book also provides, through each chapter's extra readings, online resources and other ideas which, I believe, a teacher can easily implement to teach a skill area. All of the above gives the book a somewhat systematic approach. Some might find it overbearing or even unnecessary, but if the book's intention is to reach teachers, both experienced and new, this approach is unquestionably wise.

What some may question, however, is Nation's choice of activities. For one thing, I wonder why many of the book's activities (e.g.

dictations, strip stories) are geared towards young and basic learners. I also question why many of the book's tasks for the EFL classroom can be done independently or in small groups/pairs (e.g. word cards, substitution practice, split-information activities), and without much critical analysis. Fortunately, Nation does include detailed activities that could be used for adult and higher level students. Furthermore, although some activities which he lists may be more suitable for younger learners, others fit neatly into the key strands of learning, are effective for assessment purposes, and provide for the collaborative/teacher-assisted learning which Donato (2000) suggests could help students better understand how language is produced, developed, and negotiated.

Overall, this book serves as an informative go-to book for EFL instructors. It is written in a jargon-free, easy-to-read style that will appeal to all, especially teachers new to the field. Moreover, it supplies a great deal of useful activities, for both small and large groups. In addition, Nation not only provides the latest research but also gives persuasive reasons for his recommended approaches. In closing, the book is a welcome addition to the library of any EFL instructor, as it both covers the basics in what and how to teach an EFL class and provides up-to-date information and ideas to pique the interest of even the most learned EFL instructor.

References

- Donato, R. (2000). Sociocultural contributions to understanding the foreign and second language classroom. In J.P. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning* (pp. 27-50). Oxford: Oxford University Press.