

Planning Lessons and Courses: Designing sequences of work for the language classroom Tessa Woodward (CUP) 2001 (ISBN: 0521633540).

Written in the first person as a dialogue with the reader, and illustrated with examples from both her own and other teachers' experience, this is a very accessible book for those training to be teachers and those who already are teaching. It takes as its starting point clarification of what Woodward means by planning; this was useful as I, along with other teacher trainers, immediately assumed that the book would cover issues relevant to formally assessed lesson planning: articulating aims, anticipating problems and knowing what knowledge to assume students bring to any particular lesson.

Woodward, however, defines planning as: "...what most working teachers do when they say they're planning their lessons...: considering the students, thinking of content, materials and activities that could go into a course or lesson, jotting these down, having a quiet ponder, cutting things out of magazines and anything else that you feel will help you teach well and the students to learn a lot, i.e. to ensure our lessons and courses are good."

With this in mind, the book is organised into 8 chapters, posing and answering 7 questions that underlie teacher thinking - consciously or unconsciously: Who are the students? How long is the lesson? What can go into a lesson? How do people learn and so how can we teach? What can we teach with? How can we vary the activities we do? What are our freedoms and constraints? and (the one which isn't entitled with a question) Getting down to preparation. Each chapter then sets out to discuss or address issues posed by the question in the title, and intersperses the discussion with ideas for activities which teachers could use with their classes.

In the chapter on learning, for example, Woodward organised the first section into 4 different ways that people learn - by finding out for one's self (noticing and experiencing), by having someone explain, by being exposed to something and learning unconsciously (periphery learning), and by using and refining something which is not yet fully understood/learned; each of these four is then set in the classroom context - with suggestions for activities for each. The second section addresses ways that learning opportunity and/or instruction can be organised (test-teach-test, TBL, PPP and staging a receptive-skills focus).

There is a lot here, and it could be read at various depths. For the inexperienced teacher, the information is presented in a way that is clear and supportive; for experienced, reflective teachers it makes conscious what many of us already do and/or question and so may serve as the basis for more critical reflection.

Rather than sitting down and reading whole chapters at a go, Woodward suggests the reader dip into chapters and read what seems relevant and/or important to her/him at any particular time. Chapters also contain useful references to further reading that can be done. The book is reassuring, very practical and informal in style; the map of the book is clear and makes moving around within the book straightforward. Most of the chapters include ideas for activities, which are easy to follow and will be easy to adapt to specific classes if necessary. Sections within each chapter are short and there are drawings throughout, some of them humorous.

Without doubt, there are experienced teachers who will benefit from reading this book; for many of us depth and more of a challenge to current practice and

thinking would be in order. It is definitely a book that I would recommend both for teachers in training and for teachers with some experience. It will encourage thinking as well as reassure and hopefully inform us so that we will make our practice more principled and more effective. (BN) ihj September 2001