Reviews

Reading (1993) 27 (1)
0034–0472 $2.00

Hudson, Richard, **Teaching Grammar – a guide for the National Curriculum** (1992). Oxford: Blackwell, xiii+286 pp. Price £10.99. ISBN 0-631-16625-4 pbk, £32.50. ISBN 0-631-16624-6 Hbk

This book is the second volume in the *Language in Education* series edited by Michael Stubbs, a series which aims to help classroom practice by providing a systematic study of language and to foster rational debate in areas that are too often obscured by emotion.

Hudson writes in a reader-friendly way. He explains what grammar is by showing what grammarians do, an approach that leads easily to his emphasis on discovery-learning as the best way to teach children knowledge about language successfully. This is the centre of the book: a collection of KAL lessons offered as examples across the ten levels of the Attainment Targets. What I found particularly supportive for an anxious teacher was the two-stage approach he adopts. First, he teaches the reader about, say, tense, before going on to show how that same knowledge could be taught at a simpler level to children. He admits that he has no classroom expertise but this is not a serious lack; the modifications a teacher would have to make would be in organisation and, occasionally, to make an example less complex. I tried some of his Key Stage 1 suggestions in an infant class and found them very productive.

He points out that the Statements of Attainment are not always very specific about the language knowledge that the NCC wants children to have. What he offers is one possible specification. Teachers who use this book will be helped to devise their own language tasks to promote the achievement of particular Statements. Oddly, there is no discussion of the Programmes of Study in this Part on the teaching of KAL, where they would have most point. Instead, their discussion is postponed until a brief but valuable Appendix on the way that the Cox Report spells out the language knowledge that emerged in the Programmes.

This is a strangely organised book. About 130 pages separate the chapter in Part One on Standard English from the one in Part Three that lists 193 examples of Non-Standard English. However, wherever it is placed, this list will entice most readers. I was eager to find this list and extensive searching in my memory produced a total of three items. I doubt if other products of the Salford Irish working class would find more. 193 items looks extensive and it is; nor is it complete; but I wonder, yet again, if many Britons habitually use more than a very tiny number of Non-Standard syntactic features. If they do not, if the difference between Standard and Non-Standard grammars is a small fraction of one per cent, what is all the fuss about? There are many language problems facing writers that have nothing to do with grammar and much to do with the differences between speech and writing or the choice of an appropriate register.

Elsewhere in this well-written, absorbing and instructive book are annotated lists of books on language, a defence of the teaching of grammar and a short yet substantial encyclopaedia of grammar that is a useful complement to the Harris and Wilkinson Glossary produced for LINC. Teachers at all levels would learn from what he has to teach; students in training would benefit from attempting several of the grammar activities themselves.

Jim Johnson is lecturer in Education at the Nottingham Trent University.

McLane, Joan Brooks and McNamee, Gillian Dowley, **Early Literacy** (1990). Harvard University Press, 161 pp. Price £5.95, ISBN 0-674-221656 pbk. £14.25, ISBN 0-674-221648 hbk.

Early Literacy (and it might have been entitled Emergent Literacy because throughout the book the two terms are joined by an 'or') is one of the books in the series: The Developing Child edited by Jerome Bruner and Michael Cole. Like other texts in the series it provides a general introduction to the topic backed by important references. As one might expect therefore Clay, Teale, Bissex, Heath, etc. are used to debate young children's literacy development up to about 6 years of age.

The authors put forward the view that children's literacy development begins early, and examples of children's (0–2 years of age) involvement with literacy are provided. Alongside those examples the authors, as one would predict, emphasise constantly the important role of significant people in the children's lives who provide a critical role as providers of materials, models, demonstrators, story readers and helpers, instructors and encouragers.

The central chapters of the book, beyond the introduction and conclusion, consider 'Bridges to Literacy' where the important roles of play, talk and drawing are debated; 'Writing' with many examples drawn from Paul Bissex's early writing in GNYS AT WRK; 'Reading' where the refs are mainly USA based and the stress is placed upon environmental print and story readings, some transcripts give extra insights in this chapter; in 'At Home and Neighbourhood' there are important insights into three quite different social and cultural backgrounds where adults encourage children into literacy but using strategies which are dissimilar; 'Pre-School and Kindergarten' suggests basic literacy activities (rather than basic skills) so reading and writing for a purpose, pretend play which includes literacy opportunities, readily available reading and writing materials, a writing area and story reading.

Jennifer's reading of a book, with a large leaf in the palm of each hand and examples of Joshua's literacy development are insightful parts of this book. But, then, important too are the adult's response to these early literacy events. The adult accepts the child's activities and attempts to build upon them.

An interesting feature of the book is the attention given to the teacher or adult acting as a scribe for the child's dictated stories and the suggestion that the dictation be followed by dramatising the story as a further growth point. Process writing with invented spellings and/or scribing dictated stories provides an important area of debate for early childhood educators. This text suggests that both might be used according to the needs of the child.

This is a very readable book which points the way to other references for those students, parents and teachers who would wish to extend their thinking after reading this relatively short text. It concludes appropriately by asking us to consider 'the continuity – or lack of continuity – between the child's experiences with literacy at home and those encountered in school'. That is an area to which

teachers of young children must give attention if the strengths of the developing literacy user are to be utilised fully.

Robin Campbell is Professor of Primary Education at the University of Hertfordshire.

Arnold, Roslyn, **Writing Development: Magic in the Brain.** (1991). Buckingham: Open University Press. 136pp. Price £10.99. Pbk. ISBN 0-335-15195-7.

This book makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of what happens when children write. Drawing on the ideas of Moffett, Britton, and Wilkinson, it evolves a psychodynamic model of writing which is centred on the self-expressive needs of the writer. These, through interaction with varieties of discourse and audience, form the mainspring for writing development: a writer's sense of self is enhanced through the experience of writing and this in turn develops an increasing awareness of audience and differentiation in the language used.

The case studies, which form a major part of the book, illustrate and substantiate the author's argument. Drawn from her work undertaken with eleven to fourteen year olds as part of a four year writing intervention programme, they chart the progress of five individuals, who represent a range of personalities and writing abilities. Although each pupil's development is unique, it is clear that there were certain experiences from which they all benefited. In the early stages of the programme, concentration exercises enabled them to focus on their inner speech in a way that facilitated self-expressive writing. Subsequently, they were able to develop their self-awareness by communicating with a new and unknown audience as part of a letter exchange. The importance of relationships in a writer's development is firmly established as a means of confirming and challenging the writer.

One thing that emerges clearly, if inadvertently, from this book is how hard it is to assess writing progress. In order to measure the success of the intervention programme, the author devised a series of writing tasks designed to test the pupils' developing abilities. The limitations, both of the tasks themselves and their effectiveness as a means of measuring progress, become especially clear when we read the case studies. These provide detailed, sensitive discussion of individual pieces of writing, showing how the writer's concerns have found expression through interaction with different audiences and models. The discussion emphasises how finely-tuned responses to writing need to be if individual progress is to be understood and fostered. By contrast, the accounts of the pupils' test results seem like an afterthought, adding nothing to our understanding of their writing and, in the case of less confident writers, failing to reflect their real abilities.

If, as the author suggests, writing development is highly individual, slow to occur and difficult to detect, then the construction of a coherent writing policy becomes all the more necessary and challenging. At a time when the English curriculum is likely to become more prescriptive, the author argues strongly that individual writers should be at the centre of the writing process, with the curriculum responding to their needs rather than being imposed upon them. However, individual writing programmes require a good understanding of writing development by the teacher if they are to be effective. This book contributes to that understanding, not only through its psychodynamic model of development, but also through its identification and analysis of audience, creativity, thinking and point of view as critical areas of growth.

The final section of the book, which seeks to apply the author's experience to general classroom practice, is less well developed. It does not convincingly resolve the tension between a process-based approach to writing and the need for formal testing; and some readers will find its suggestion that the curriculum should centre on just two discourse categories (narrative and argument) too limiting.

However, the feel of the book as a whole is that it does not provide glib answers to the challenges of the approach it advocates. Instead, it opens up possibilities for the kind of classroom-based research which is essential if a child-centred approach to writing is to retain its credibility. It also provides an exciting record of what such an approach can achieve.

Margaret Axford is the Course Director of the Primary PGCE at King Alfred's College, Winchester.

Ohanian, Susan, **Within the Forest – a new approach to Fairy Tales, Volume 2** (1991). Chicago: SRA MacMillan/ McGraw Hill, 216 pp+large poster. ISBN 0-574-66107-7

'Within the Forest' Volume 2 consists of a large, brightly coloured ring binder containing a preface and introduction, 3 booklets of substantial length and large poster.

The preface and introduction offer a comprehensive account of the rationale behind the pack. The preface by Gareth B. Matthews discusses such questions as "What should be our attitudes towards fairy tales" and his references range from Aristotle to Bettelheim.

Ohanian then explains how the activities in the pack should be introduced and the 3 booklets each focus on a different fairy tale. In this pack they are

- Little Red Riding Hood
- Rapunzel
- Hansel and Gretel

These booklets are substantial in size (ranging from 47 to 70 pages each) and each offer a brief discussion about each tale, offering a fascinating account of "the message of the tale" – (Bettelheim appears here again) plus examples of the tale from different cultures, with their similarities and differences. Bibliographies are provided for children and adults, and the meat of the booklets are the 'Reader Response Activities'. These offer a wide variety of writing activities including narrative, chronological and factual and for a variety of purposes and possible audiences. Children are encouraged to work individually and also co-operatively and extracts from different versions of the tales are included where appropriate.

The pack also includes a large poster consisting of a forest setting and the major characters from the 3 tales gathered together for a picnic. Students are challenged to identify the characters and the reverse of the poster offers 10 open-ended questions for the teacher to use as discussion starters. The poster illustration is reproduced (although considerably reduced) on the front cover of the binder and the back cover shows the same spot in the forest with the characters having left. It is suggested that this too can be used as a discussion point.

The aim of the pack is laudable – to enable children to become 'experienced literacy critics' and 'responsible insightful, articulate, and respectful readers and commentators'. Indeed throughout the introduction much emphasis is placed on freedom and discipline. There is a brief philosophical discussion about this and the very pertinent question raised (although not answered), "As Frank Smith has pointed out, the real issue is one of *control*. Do we trust children to learn on their own or do we feel we must control their learning every step of the way?"

It is clear from this comment that SRA have considered the criticisms of their previously produced and highly structured packs. But they do not fully

reject their structured approach. There are very specific guidelines on how the packs should be introduced – all very user friendly but still heavily didactic.

The pack then goes on to describe 'getting started' – much of which consists of useful ideas, but my initial response when told that this is the way it *must* be done, is to rebel. It certainly makes me reflect upon freedom and control and for me there is a small but significant gap between the stated aims and required action here.

However, the main body of work contained in the 3 booklets is interesting and the best is very good indeed. Whoever uses the package will identify their favourite 'Reading Response Activities' (not the snappiest of titles I admit) and I could not decide between completing a job application form for the post of wolf, and writing 2 newspaper headlines about what happened to Red Riding Hood, one to appear in 'The Daily Clarion' ("Call of the Wild") published in Wolf City, Wyoming "all the news in bite-sized chunks", the other in 'The Daily Course' – published by Red Riding Hood's uncle.

The activities are grouped under a variety of headings – 'Read it Again', 'Act it out', 'Take another Look', 'Point of View', 'Riddling around', 'Just the Facts' and even provide appropriate 'Mask Patterns'.

In many ways this is the major strength of the pack – its variety. There is enough there for everyone to find something of interest. Many of the activities, which are all photocopiable, could be adapted to other texts and stories, and certainly provide the teacher with sufficient stimulus to develop this approach further.

The emphasis in the package is generally on freedom, choice, fun and worthwhile, interesting activity. The package would make a useful addition to the busy primary classroom.

Iris Keating is a lecturer in education at Crewe + Alsager College of High Education in Cheshire.