

# TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE PRIMARY CLASSROOM

by Susan Halliwell  
London: Longman, 1992,

*(Translated and adapted as La Enseñanza del Inglés en la Educación Primaria. Metodología práctica para la clase de primaria en el nuevo sistema educativo español. London: Longman, 1993.*

The current changes in the Spanish Education system have been felt most keenly at the level of the Primary School. Despite the huge investment of time and energy that *maestros* everywhere have been making in up-grading their own abilities, there clearly is a need for further resources and support. The emphasis on a more learner-centred curriculum, and on the importance of the teacher's role in planning and producing teaching materials, puts even more pressure on individuals who sometimes are unsure as to their competence to handle these. Susan Halliwell's practical and down-to-earth "Handbook for Language Teachers" –originally in English, and now with a version translated into Spanish and adapted to the Spanish primary school situation– could easily fill in some of the gaps which all the training courses in the world cannot.

The book is divided into two parts, of which the first deals

with the human elements, learners and teacher; and the second moves on to the interface, through materials and resources. Both have four chapters, the last of which is a set of practical activities for use in the classroom.

Halliwell begins by centring learning on the learner. She describes young learners and their most important characteristics and discusses priorities for learning. Every teacher –she believes– needs to establish these priorities for him or herself: if they do not go through this process, then nothing that they do will have any coherence to it. Halliwell's next step is to detail the kind of implications which these priorities entail.

Teaching as a profession attracts many idealists who very quickly burn themselves out, and so Halliwell's down-to-earth advice on the pragmatic aspects of lesson-planning are a great relief. She talks sensibly of "stir" and "settle" activities; those which raise energy –in a positive or a negative way and those which calm–through concentration, or boredom. And her recommendation is that teachers look at what they do, when, and why they do it, and that they should aim at ensuring learners mental and physical "engagement" in their work through variety and simplicity.

The consequences of "being realistic" are looked at in terms of the decision-making involved in organising the teaching programme. She

questions how teachers choose, adapt and supplement, and pace their use of coursebooks, and follows this by suggesting a procedure for those who decide not to use one. Finally, she describes ways in which the teaching of English can be integrated into the teaching of other subjects. This theme is fully developed in the practical activities which appear at the end of the book.

*Teaching English in the Primary Classroom* is exceptionally clear in style and presentation. The visuals are good, but not over-ambitious, and although the section which underlines the advantages of teaching English classes in English could seem patronising to some readers, it is not, it contextualizes this in terms of the need to use a variety of channels to ensure good communication.

Teachers at whatever level of education should never attempt to do things which they are not "comfortable" with, but at the same time we are all aware that Change – with a capital "c"– is a part of our everyday life. Coursebooks are changing, courses are changing, and teachers are changing too. The emphasis on learning rather than on teaching, means we all need to strive to keep up to date. Here, in this book, we have a valuable tool which I am sure will help many people in our ever-changing profession.

Bryan Robinson