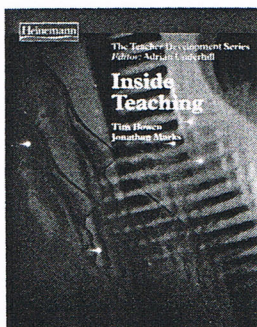


INSIDE TEACHING

The 'expert' and the classroom teacher: Metaphors for teacher self-development.

by Tim Bowen
and Jonathan Marks
Oxford: Heinemann, 1994



At, and after the **X Jornadas pedagógicas** a number of things set me thinking about teachers and teacher self-development. In the first place, came a workshop on just that theme which I had led; secondly there was Jane Revell's rather self-indulgent, but nonetheless immensely enjoyable (Elvis Presley's 'Lonesome tonight' included), plenary session on 'Teacher beliefs', held last thing on the Friday afternoon. Jane Revell used essentially a top-down training approach - although she many times asked for, and sometimes received feedback from the public - which is really rather contrary to the spirit of this kind of teacher development work. The third and fourth experiences involved friends I spoke to during or after the **Jornadas**. One teacher came up to me between sessions seething with anger: 'Next year I'm going to give this a miss!', she proclaimed. 'There's absolutely nothing new. How can these people come here again and

again and tell us the same things?' Another, a week or so later over a cup of coffee, said more or less the same: 'X used to be such a good speaker,' she lamented, 'but that session was just awful!' When I first read the chapter headings of *Inside Teaching* the last of these brought my two friends back to mind. Chapter 12 is entitled 'Ten year's experience or one year experienced ten times?'. I think both of my friends are in the same boat: they have experienced the same year's teaching ten times over, and consequently are still looking for a Holy Grail: a book of infallible ideas for the classroom. Jane Revell's plenary session, on the other hand, had presupposed that that search was futile, but it was so closely tied in to the expectations of the **Jornadas** situation that it was impossible for her to break with the top-down 'I-am-the-'expert'-You-have-come-to-learn-from-me' frame. Jane wanted to make her audience feel their attitudes and beliefs were every bit as important as hers were, but she did not allow for the fact that she was standing on a pedestal against a halo of OHP-projected light and, as the music faded away, she remained there.

'TEACHER DEVELOPMENT is about becoming the best teacher you can be'. With this sentence from Adrian Underhill the introduction to *Inside Teaching* begins. His is a standpoint reiterated many times over by the work's authors, in many different ways. Both my angry friends, and Jane Revell too, would do well to work their way through Tim Bowen and Jonathan Mark's book

as it seeks primarily to help the reader to view their teaching as being 'ten years' experience' and not 'one year experienced ten times', and in so doing it establishes a non-hierarchical relationship between the so-called 'expert' and the classroom teacher, through raising the latter's status in their own eyes.

Derived from this approach, and suffusing the book throughout, Bowen and Marks consistently propound the view that it is the individual teacher who is solely responsible for their achievement on the way to the goal of becoming the best teacher they can. This book is written as a means of facilitating that achievement, and it is written to be read and to be worked through by teachers who have found in their teaching a certain need for answers to un-stated questions, who perhaps feel themselves isolated, frustrated, unsure, or simply out-of-sorts with the way they are teaching. They write for the teacher who views their development as unfinished and unfinishable, as 'work in progress'. But although their reader is alone, they write with the group in mind, in the belief that while one alone can use such a book and achieve much in the way of personal self-development, the whole process is greatly enhanced by the support of peers and/or a collaborative peer group.

The general tone of this book is eminently readable. Bowen and Marks talk from their own experience, and continuously put up their own views - 'we think ...' - as a benchmark, a starting point to stimulate the reader. They do

this knowingly and at times, I suspect, unwillingly for it is not their intention to dictate, but rather to provoke thought and investigation. To achieve this, the tasks they offer take many forms: there are checklists to complete and share with others; metaphors, elegantly developed to provide insights into classroom realities and cut across the jargon of theory and top-down input training; and a string of quotations from teachers and learners who have 'been there' already, and whose contributions are both illuminating and reassuring. Throughout, the book is reflective and non-prescriptive: a book to work through, slowly and thoughtfully, taking time to meditate on one's responses to the tasks described.

The topics covered chapter by chapter span the range of ELT knowledge areas and skills from 'The glamour of grammar and the brass tacks of syntax' (Chapter 6) to 'Write on: some thoughts on teaching writing' (Chapter 10); only speaking is missed out, as a discrete skill-based chapter. Within each chapter the same basic structure appears: the topic is introduced, frequently through comments on an 'accepted doctrine' of the subject; there then follow a number of tasks to complete while reading, or at a later point. Next, the authors present their 'results' based on groups of teachers or learners they have worked with. And finally, there is a commentary on the topic directing the reader towards further insights into the personal response they have made to the task. The chapter is then rounded off with some recommended reading and a specific bibliography.

In dealing with each topic, the authors highlight specific aspects of it, and start out to help the reader find what their personal preference in this area is. This may mean simply asking 'Do I have a consistent approach to handling errors/reading/listening?', or it may involve more detailed consideration of others' views, as a lead in to the reader's making up their own mind. The next step is to describe the individual's approach and, once that is clear, to go beyond it in the search for insights into that approach, and for the alternatives available: looking always for the rationale and for the consequences for all parties of adopting any specific alternative.

So we find '**Into the inner sanctum**: Teachers and terminology' (Chapter 2) is an approach to the demystification of jargon, and the sometimes apparently irrelevant theories which lie behind it. The top-down approach applied to teacher-training - which is essentially an inversion of education in its true meaning, mistakenly putting teaching before learning - provides for 'experts' who enlighten the 'ignorant'. Many teachers have experienced the barrier which this top-down hierarchy of learning represents, when it is physically reinforced by the use of platforms on which the teacher must stand if they wish to use the blackboard, and which raise them above their learners. *Inside teaching*, sets out to reduce the effect of these linguistic, physical and psychological barriers by helping practising teachers to look at jargon for what it is; to lose their distaste for it; and to appreciate the advantages it can bring.

As part of this process of reassessing the environment in which we teach, in Chapter 3, '**On the inside looking in**: Collaborative classroom research', Bowen and Marks move the reader into the world of classroom research, self-observation, peer observation, learner observation, and evaluation. Here, they signpost a number of ways in which the individual, with or without the help of colleagues or friends, can open up the practice of their own classroom for a first tentative look at those things which they may not be happy about. Self-observation, in the form of making audio- or video-recordings of classes, or in the text of a teaching diary kept by the individual teacher, are just two means of doing this which this book makes simple and accessible. The subsequent discussion of what has been observed can be studied through the application of tasks like the following, through which the authors subtly but penetratingly move the reader towards the heart of their work:

Look at the following list of metaphors for the teacher and see which ones you most closely identify with. complete the sentences.

- a I see myself as an actor, because...
- b I see myself as a guide, because...
- c I see myself as a diplomat, because...
- d I see myself as a waiter, because...
- e I see myself as a chat-show host, because...
- f I see myself as a coach, because...

Now write some more metaphors of your own for your role in the classroom and reflect on what they suggest about your attitudes to your learners, your tasks in the classroom and your work as a teacher in general. (p. 41).

The importance of observation, whoever carries it out - be it the individual teacher, a friendly colleague, or the students who attend the classes - is something which cannot be too highly stressed. All too often we are only aware of what we think happens in our classrooms, and quite unaware of what actually happens. The authors of *Inside teaching* make a number of valuable suggestions as to ways in which we can take the sting out of being observed. Perhaps the most powerful of these is their reference to Adrian Underhill's defense of the 'privilege of being observed': it really is a privilege to think that someone is willing to give up one or more hours of their own time to watch you teaching. Making a pact with a friendly colleague in advance, establishing the ground rules from which they are going to observe, and controlling the circumstances of the observation and of the subsequent exchange of feedback, are the basic requirements which can ensure the observation process is beneficial and as stress-free as possible for all concerned.

Subtitled 'Looking back and looking forward', Bowen and Marks' final chapter helps the reader to reconsider tasks presented at the outset of their reading - the 'Articles of faith' (p.

7) and the 'Classroom metaphors' (p.13) and encourages them to move forward by contemplating these in order to decide whether or not they have changed their views as a result of reading the book. They are then urged to move on by deciding what they view as minimum requirements of the language learning triangle - teacher, learner and language. The authors offer their own response to this question - motivation, data, opportunities and feedback -but more importantly, they ask the reader to think about their response, and to view the function of the teacher in the light of this. Does the teacher interfere with or inhibit this learning process? Subsequently there follows the penultimate task in the book, yet again an attractive metaphorical approach:

Now here are some possible ways of looking at the process of language learning. Note which ones seem illuminating for you, and whether any others spring to mind.

Learning a language is like:

- building a wall;
- climbing a ladder;
- walking through a jungle;
- learning to ride a bike;
- developing a photograph;
- doing a jigsaw puzzle.

If you think of language learning in each of these ways, what are the implications for the role of the teacher? eg Learning a language is like building a wall, and the role of the teacher is... (p.160-170).

To end this review let me offer my own adaptation of this particular metaphorical task:

Learning to become the best teacher I can is like:

- ... going on a long, long journey. Before setting out the teacher needs to prepare as best they can. They need to decide on the equipment they want to take with them, on how much they can reasonably hope to carry, and they need to pack it all away carefully; they must also dress themselves adequately for the journey, in accordance with the terrain they expect to have to cross. Once the teacher sets out on this journey they have many important decisions to take: should they travel alone, or with others; which route should they take; do they have time to stop and explore interesting sidepaths; how can they most easily reach the heights from which best to view new, attractive landscapes? All of these, and many more, beset them on their way. *Inside Teaching* should serve them well as a full and complete map and guide book for such a long, exciting and fulfilling journey.

Reviewed by Bryan Robinson