

Mixing business with pleasure

Teaching Business English,
Mark Ellis & Christine Johnson,
OUP, 1994, £9.40

Bryan Robinson

STARTING A BOOK at the last chapter is one of those 'forbidden' pleasures everyone should indulge in, and in the case of *Teaching Business English* it's the most revealing way of putting 'Contents' into context. You see, Chapter 14 is entitled 'Current trends in Business English' and the subtitles include 'Language training v. skills training', 'The influence of management training', and 'Cross-cultural awareness' but they're all sewn up in five-and-a-half pages! Oh dear! Perhaps, the rest won't live up to the back-cover-blurb expectations?

Mark Ellis and Christine Johnson - the authors - and LTS Training and Consulting - the organisation they work for - have enough of a track record to ensure experienced trainers give this book serious consideration. However, back-to-front reading makes me think that it is really for the benefit of would-be-trainers that this book has been written.

To start with, the authors divide it into three parts: an

introduction aimed directly at the novice trainer; a four-chapter study of learner needs analysis; and an overview of activities and materials.

The scene is set by dealing with the inter-relationship existing between General English and Business English (BE). Differences in learning situations, learner characteristics and objectives are described; and the writers highlight the key characteristics of BE learners as being awareness of purpose, the social aspects of learning needs, and the importance of clarity in language use. All clearly-stated, and quite uncontentious.

This approach is then developed in what is basically a detailed, reasoned philosophy behind the successful organisation of BE courses: 'be as professional in your business as they are in theirs'. The process of 'Information gathering': eliciting objectives; carrying out job analysis; pre-course and on-going needs analysis; and the painstaking breakdown of this into the contents of a course are - in cold, commercial terms - what it's all about. Motivation, agreeing objectives, building trust and confidence: Ellis and Johnson don't miss any of the key

points founded on good, old-fashioned common sense.

Part III looks at learning activities and materials - published, learner-provided, and authentic - and at methods of developing and using these to best effect. Here we find a series of photocopiable 'framework materials' to elicit learner-centred input, and there are five example activities, topped off by some well-chosen words on the importance of balance and a progressive build-up in course design, as well as a number of 'model' course plans. There is even a glossary and an annotated bibliography.

The book seems to cover everything. So why do I feel disappointed on finishing it? Perhaps there are just too many generalisations: 'The approach that will work best with...'; 'Some groups may be competitive, others co-operative...'; 'Strong personalities will dominate ...' - and perhaps so much of what I've seen is rather familiar. It all leads me to feel that, excellent though it is as a primer, this book can only go so far. Perhaps Messrs Ellis & Johnson would like to start thinking about a follow-up...? *Bryan Robinson teaches at the University of Granada in Spain and examines on the International Baccalaureate*

Book Briefs - Americana

Anyone keen to teach American English should consider *American Blueprint* by that reliable and prolific writing duo Brian Abbs and Ingrid Freebairn (with sundry help from other authors). Published by Longman, this is a two-level course taking learners up to intermediate standard. Each level has SB (£7.10), Workbook (£3.25), TB (£6.60) and set of three class cassettes (£18.40).

Also from Longman is a new series of American Business English Skills titles - under editorship of Andrew Vaughan and Neil Heyen, who are also authors, and part authors, of two titles. *Stand and Deliver* covers business presentations; *Business Calls* is about telephone techniques; *All Work and No Play* deals with business-related social situations; and *Give and Take* offers other useful business skills. Books £5.80 each; cassettes (one for each book) £8.50 each.

Rather different for those who would like to explore American vocabulary is *The Cambridge Thesaurus of American English* by William D. Lutz. Containing 200,000 synonyms and antonyms, this is a bargain at £12.95 hardback (\$16.95). Your American lover, as we now know, may be your 'significant other', but not apparently your partner, the currently favoured British euphemism. As with any thesaurus, you'd probably need a dictionary to sort out the jockey from the serious, but this book could prove a treat, n. pleasure, delight, enjoyment, thrill, gratification, enjoyment, celebration, surprise, fun for wordaholics on either side of the Atlantic.



Teaching business English

Big business

Starting Business English,
J Loneragan and C Johnson,
BBC English, 2 video cassettes,
3 audio cassettes, S B and T B £160 + VAT

Martin Billingham

ONCE AGAIN THE BBC has come up with a superb package. This video-based course aimed at students with little prior knowledge of English tells the story of a toy manufacturer, Bibury Systems, and the marketing of its new product, Big Boss in 20 units.

The teacher's guide has a succinct introduction on how to use the course, together with a recommended programme of timings. There is a video script and an audio script and each unit has two pages of guidance notes which can be inter-

leaved with the video workbook for ease of reference.

The star of the package is the video, produced by Studio East and written by Duncan, Clymer and Kermod and directed by Phil Hill - names that spell excellence. There is dramatic tension in the strong storyline of the introduction of Big Boss and the use of a catchy theme tune hooks students and teachers alike. The language of the actors is clear and deliberate and one soon forgets the slightly unnatural slowness of the delivery. Despite the title, I have used extracts from the video to introduce functional language, vocabulary items and business situations to higher level groups and I can recommend this attractive package highly. *Martin Billingham is Chief Examiner for English for Business (1) for the LCCIEB.*