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## Teaching Language to Adults. Mixed ability teaching : meeting learners' needs.

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## BOOK REVIEW

### TEACHING LANGUAGE TO ADULTS MIXED ABILITY TEACHING: MEETING LEARNERS' NEEDS

S Ainslie (1994) Britain: Bourne Press Ltd; CILT Press.

At a time when teachers in training are undertaking TESOL studies, perhaps for the first time, there is benefit in understanding the complexity of the issues which occur when teaching language to adults. Ainslie talks about the mixed ability of groups and the need to know the students, then provides discussion on ways to start teaching and further suggests some strategies which could be utilised in the implementation stages.

In considering the mixed ability of the group the issues highlighted in the text are attention to motivation, students' interests and needs, and the external pressures which they face, for example, anxiety. Since such factors do influence teaching, the author stresses the need for time to be given to discussion of the most effective learning styles for students. Ainslie presents a chart of definition for differentiation of members within mixed ability groups (48). The purpose is that if the intending learners can identify their individual profiles within the framework, the learners become understood in a particular way.

After recognition of the "starting images" of the learners, Ainslie emphasises that three things become crucial in attempting language acquisition - creating the atmosphere for learning, developing the study skills, and third, planning and organising work (25-30), so that the gaining of knowledge and its consolidation is followed by further advancement.

Materials mentioned as useful in the teaching of language are the utilisation of media which is claimed to present the reality of language; and the study of pictures, travel brochures and news-

paper articles. The use of these materials is further supported by suggestions of activities for gaining information through role play and close exercises which can be used at different levels (31). The intentions of the activities are for building the confidence of the learner and for challenging the most able (31). Further stressed is the development of work in pairs at the outset of language acquisition and the time for the introduction of group work and individual efforts (31). The key to the acquisition of language is stated as the completion of core work accompanied by "branching work".

Ainslie states emphatically that in this multicultural society marketing for language acquisition is important. Another important factor presented is that any course must be well structured (51). It is at this point that the value of the text is highlighted. It was written for teaching language to adults, however, the diagrams and outlines in the text and the issues which are raised, could well be starting points, program foci and means of reflection for teachers involved in the acquisition of language by any group, even students in a primary school.

The challenge for teachers is to be aware of such resources which make organising for foreign language teaching "interesting, alive and relevant within the curriculum content framework". Such a short text, *Mixed Ability Teaching; Meeting Learners' Needs* is indeed worthwhile reading.

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