

## Book Review

### ***Integrating Global Issues In The Creative English Language Classroom: With Reference To The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.***

Edited by Alan Maley and Nik Peachey

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#### **An Audacious Notion of the Language Teacher Underpinning the Book:**

Before you open the book, it is important to know that the notion of “language teacher” that informs the whole book is this. As Alan Maley says in an interesting though imaginary dialogue at the beginning of the book, she is not a teacher of mere grammar and vocabulary; she is a teacher of “how to think, and feel”; she shows people, not just pupils, “inspiration, aspiration, cooperation,... and helps them think about globalization, exploitation, confrontation, subjugation...” Otherwise, she would be “a cheater, not a teacher”.

**Contents of the Book:** The thought contents of the book are the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN, set out in the Resolution the General Assembly adopted in 2015. Thus, the first seventeen chapters deal with the seventeen SDGs such as poverty, hunger, health, education, climate change, gender justice, water distribution, sanitation, energy, environment, and social justice. Thus, the thought contents are

morally ennobling, educationally useful, and intellectually stimulating.

Those who are familiar with textbooks devoted to Value Education, for example OUP’s ***Living in Harmony*** series, cannot but recall that the contents of those books include “universal human values of peace, love, truth and cooperation, so as to cultivate the knowledge, skill and attitude needed to achieve and sustain a global culture of peace” and sound very much like the thought contents of the book under review.

As language teachers would expect, the language contents are equally weighty and multifarious. They involve all the four skills (LSRW) and elements such as grammar and vocabulary. In fact, they go beyond the traditional list to include (a) more recently designed communication skills such as the ones involved in infographics, and (b) creativity skills such as ‘problem solving’, ‘making something new’, ‘perceiving old things in new ways’, ‘finding new connections’, ‘inventing and designing a game’, ‘interpreting a poem’ or ‘writing a story’. As the book is an integration of print and internet materials, it exploits a huge amount of materials in the world of the cyberspace.

As the age range of the target readers is as wide as 7 to 16 years, the difficulty levels of the vocabulary items and the readability levels of the texts to be studied or produced also vary widely. The activities are not similar to the problem-solving “tasks” of Prabhu’s Communicational Teaching Project

but activities in a general sense. They are of general interest. As such, they do not require the sophisticated knowledge of Prabu's technically fine-combed definitions of "tasks". Therefore, the activities in the book are readily comprehensible and easily implementable.

**An Example of an Activity:** This is the first activity in Chapter 2. Its Aim is to raise learners' awareness of global poverty. The Language Focus suggests vocabulary items dealing with values, possession, and poverty. The Creativity Focus specifies preparing collages to develop symbolic thinking. And the SDG Focus is to familiarise students with the first of the seventeen SDGs in the UN list.

One of the instructions under "Preparation" requires using the webliographic details for collecting pictures on the theme of poverty from the back numbers of **National Geographic**. The instructions under "Procedure", though many in number, are as simple, clear and specific as the first instruction: "Introduce the no poverty ... project by citing **Mahatma Gandhi**: 'Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need but not every man's greed.'" Another instruction is to get the learners to think of questions such as "What does it mean to be rich?" and "Do you think you live in a poor or rich country? Why?" Another important instruction requires the teacher to discuss with students how to illustrate abstract nouns like "love" and "truth".

The outcome of all these detailed and sumptuous instructions is the following: illustrations of poverty; a world map showing where poverty exists; cut-outs and drawings; vocabulary items and pictures of objects

representative of poverty and wealth; and samples of language of co-operation and sharing. This is followed by "Follow Up", which requires the class to display the outcomes.

**Unique Features of the Book:** The book is edited by two ELT giants: (a) Alan Maley, the recipient of ELTons Lifetime Award and, in my estimate, the world's most prolific writer/editor of ELT books for classroom use; and (b) Nik Peachey, two time winner of British Council innovation award for developing internet technology for ELT materials and publications. This is the first book that I know of which incorporates so many materials in the internet. Its two editors and twenty odd contributors come from such a variety of cultures and contexts that the book is rare in its representativeness of the different ELT and Educational practices in the world, and therefore usable anywhere in the world.

It is also unique in that every one of the 103 activities includes a **Creativity Focus**, in addition to the Language Focus and the SDG focus. It is rare in another feature, too: making it easy for busy teachers, as mentioned above, all the chapters in the book follow the same structure, and all the activities follow identical structures.

**Who is this book for:** If you are already practising or planning to practise the principle of teaching English through an academic subject as the thought content, as are all the subject teachers in English medium schools and colleges all over the world, this is the book for you. Suppose you have the practice in your school or college of cobbling together your own **course book**. Then, this book can be an excellent **source book** for you. If you are following or going to follow the **TBLT (Task-**

**Based Language Teaching**), remember, this book presents **103 activities**. If you want to make your ELT practice richer, more novel and more modern by adding Creativity to it, this is the book for you.

By the way, if you want to sharpen your understanding of what is meant by creative teaching, download and study **“Creativity in the English Language Classroom”** edited, again, by Alan Maley and Nik Peachey and published by the British Council just two years ago.

**This is a “complete” book:** Each one of the 103 activities in this book has **three focuses: Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) focus; language focus, and creativity focus**. The book covers all the four classic language skills: LSRW. It also covers all the language elements namely vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Interestingly, under the Writing Skills, several chapters include exercises in writing/designing infographics, after the models in the reading exercises. By the same token, it involves a huge number of exercises involving the search for reading and listening skills materials available only in the internet, making the book an internet-oriented rarity among ELT books.

Unlike many books, this book brings together both intensive and extensive reading, without ignoring texts that require skimming and scanning. Similarly, it has brought in reading and writing poetry, and writing short drama texts, which precede many of the role-play activities. While learners’ age groups range between 7 and 16 years, the proficiency levels range between A1 and C1 according to the Common European Framework (CEFR). As

for visuals in the book, at a cursory glance, they appear to be inadequate. But the exercises in internet search involve a huge number of visuals, including infographics. Happily, departing from the common practice of excluding references in student textbooks for updating the teacher and the teacher trainee, many of the twenty two chapters in the book include a small number of excellent references and “further resources”, many of which are to be searched out in the internet.

**Teacher Friendly Features:** A teacher can easily conduct the activities described in the book, as the instructions are simple to understand and easy to implement. One of the typical examples that come to my mind is this one from Chapter 4: “Write the word ‘beautiful’ on the board.” Mind you, I’m not suggesting that all the instructions in the book are so simple as to bring into play mindlessness.

Although I found a few rare words, such as “gordita”, “quesadilla” and “favela” in the target vocabulary in two units, overall, the words listed for learning in the activities are really useful. In this context, it is good to remember (a) that the profession has moved slightly but significantly away from Michael West’s **General Service List** of the 1950s, and (b) that in the context of a lesson topic-driven words, though outside lists of common words, are now considered essential vocab.

The internet version of the book incorporates the facilities the teacher can use to (a) highlight parts of the text; (b) add sticky notes even in a little space; (c) fit the text into one full page; (d) add reader’s annotations in the text; and (e) even do audio recording.

**The Book Is “Free” And “Accessible”:** The book has been made downloadable for free, presumably in view of the noble thought contents, and thanks to the generosity of the contributors and the publisher. Further, it is “accessible” in several senses: it’s totally jargon-free; it does not assume knowledge of the latest developments in ELT such as Dogme Effect; and it includes all the “webliographic” details of its internet references.

**Is This A Perfect Book?** Teachers in educational cultures such as India, where many institutions follow the Language Through Literature Approach, the users of this book will miss the texts – original or adapted or abridged – from canonical literature such as Wordsworth’s “Daffodils”, Mark Antony’s funeral oration, and Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. It is a pity that the best seller for children, *Battle for Big Tree Country*, recommended for Extensive Reading in Chapter 20 is available only in the hard copy format.

Another problem with the book is this: the age and language proficiency ranges are so wide that the book cannot be used as a text book in typical classrooms. Sometimes, paradoxically, what contributes to the strength of a book also contributes to its weakness. In the case in hand, the attempt to integrate the internet with the book is certainly a great strength of the book. But in countries where the computer and the internet are rarely available among the student populations, the book’s use is considerably limited. For example, in **India**, although many state governments claim to give away Personal Computers (PCs) for free

to the students who have finished their 10<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> Class, the accessibility of the internet to student population is limited to the professional college students. And PCs are possessed only by a small proportion of the tertiary level students and a still smaller proportion of the students in the top notch English medium schools. In such countries, the book’s “accessibility” is considerably limited.

**A Must Read For...:** As they are supposed to encourage experimental teaching and develop a venturesome attitude to teaching, every Teacher Development Group (TDG) should choose at least one of the units in the book for trial. For those who are historically inclined, this book is a must: for it is the first ELT book to combine Creativity Exercises and SDG-driven Exercises with the usual ELT exercises. As argued in the last chapter of the book, the book will be of considerable interest to those who follow the English for Academic Purposes approach. Considering the ease as well as adequacy of the instructions for activities and the high number of activities, I would strongly recommend the book to the teachers and trainers who have been persuaded by Activity-Based Language Teaching.

As implied in the summary of the book at the beginning of this review, for those who teach Value Education, this book is an excellent source of ideas and classroom activities. Finally, in the post-secondary institutions called UNESCO-UNEVOC Centres of Vocational Education spread all over the developing countries, this book should occupy, prima facie, a unique place in their ELT curricula.