

BOOK REVIEWS

Prabhu, N. S. *Perceptions of Language Pedagogy*. Chennai, India: Orient Blackswan Pvt. Ltd., 2019.

Fools rush in where angels fear to tread. And so am I venturing on reviewing a masterpiece of the century in ELT global history by a mastermind in ELT, Dr. N S Prabhu. There have been quite a few reviews published already. Why another, one may wonder. Well, this is a token of *gurudakshina* to a *Mahaguru* from a humble nincompoop disciple who learnt the ABC of ELT under his inspiring guidance.

This is, in a sense, the academic autobiography of an ELT genius with keen insights and mindboggling perceptions of more than five decades. In another sense, it is also the biography of every committed teacher of English theorizing on his own through trial and error, successes and failures, but not having the courage to share them. In his author's note, Prabhu refers to the book as a collection of "my various papers from past decades, mostly written for conferences, into a book form." A majority of them show successive stages of continuing thought on three aspects of pedagogy.

According to the editor of the volume, Geetha Durairajan, "the twenty-nine articles in this volume encapsulate a lifetime of contemplation and articulation on language pedagogy." The publishers say this book "captures different stages in an intellectual journey from making a quiet entry into the world of ELT through an article published in a daily newspaper in 1966 to becoming one of the best-known practitioners and radical thinkers in the field."

Just a cursory run through the chapter titles brings to us the amazing, comprehensive, intellectual acumen of the author. Some titles are deceptively simple and straightforward: e.g. 'Rational Approach to English Teaching'; 'Three

Modules in Second Language Pedagogy'; 'Communicative Language Teaching'; 'Three Perceptions'. Some titles startle you into a new awareness: e.g. 'There is No Best Method – Why?'; 'Teaching is At Most Hoping For the Best'; 'Should Materials Be Prescribed?' Other titles present conflicts: 'Language Acquisition – Equipping or Enabling?'; 'Materials as Support'; 'Materials as Constraint'; 'A Case Against Practice'.

Here is a treasure trove of concepts: direct contact vs. remote control; acquisition through deployment; teacher's sense of plausibility; procedural syllabus; ideation vs. ideology; teaching language for / as / through communication. Researchers in ELT can take up doctoral studies on each of these. English teachers find here ideas which "I have toyed with but never fully carried out". Trainers have here concepts for workshops galore. Finally, our second language learners in India from other medium schools, rural background, will begin to look forward to English classes when their teachers implement the ideas herein. Before we close, just a couple of quotable quotes. "Perhaps comprehension is like nutrition, leading to production, while remedial grammar is the medication for the ailments of production."

"Teaching is at most hoping for the best."

If you haven't read this book, you have missed something valuable in your academic journey. Hurry up and get a copy. Happy reading!

PS: Don't miss the icing on the cake – the interview of the author by the editor in the last two chapters – the quintessence of ELT.

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