

Dealing with Difficulties

Dealing with Difficulties: solutions, strategies and suggestions for successful teaching.

By Luke Prodromou and Lindsay Clandfield

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The seeds for such a practical, relevant title were sown many years ago when, realising early on his career that a passion for Shakespeare did not hold much credibility with truculent teenagers, Luke Prodromou began to adopt various techniques to overcome his classroom difficulties. Co-author, Lindsay Clandfield also faced a similar struggle with what he refers to as 'the ugly side of teaching'. One can imagine exchanges between the two being filled with much jaw-dropping and sombre shaking of the head as they regaled each other with spine-chilling incidents that seemed to defy solution. The outcome is this highly recommended title.

Readers will recognise in their own classes many of the difficulties the authors describe in five main sections. These deal with issues on large classrooms and classroom management, discipline problems, mixed level classes, homework and teaching exam classes. Each section is introduced by a question and answer section that raises awareness of the nature of the problem and hints at options available. This is not just a collection of practical tips; all tasks are based on sound methodology. The work of Vygotsky seems to appear in more and more ELT titles, often in a distorted manner, so it was refreshing to read in a simplified but not patronising manner how Vygotsky's zone of proximal development can assist teachers by focusing on scaffolding, training and mediational means. The authors are quick to point out that they're in no way tried and trusted recipes for success; adaptation to one's particular problem may be the key here.

Some of the most useful activities include managing big numbers by adopting techniques such as knowing and using students' names, using all possible space and having routines. Others on how to get the students' attention and finishing a lesson in the right manner are certainly worth an asterisk. Handling latecomers can be awkward; check out page nineteen for six ways to avoid ugly confrontations on that score. Discipline problems, listed as overt, such as shouting and chewing gum, and covert, like sighing noisily and packing up early, are dealt with by tasks on diffusing the situation. Included here are building a system of rewards and drawing up various forms of a class & teacher contract. Other useful tasks worth looking into are those for occupying early finishers and getting the class to email their written work to the teacher.

A sixth section on professional development seemed to me at first to be out of place in such a title. On closer reading I realised that it certainly isn't! The eleven tips there on development, including asking to observe and to be observed, exchanging classes and setting up a swap shop, are all of immense value. The list of suggested reading for development following this section, twenty-seven titles in all, and including my own

favourite *Diary of a Language Teacher* by Joachim Appel, has clearly been compiled by authors with xperience TEFL's more useful literature.

All of which perhaps explains why *Dealing with Difficulties* beat off two heavyweight titles from Pearson and CUP to win the 20006 Ben Warren award for being the most outstanding title in the field of language teacher education. The *Professional Perspectives* series from DELTA publishing, of which this is only one of ten excellent titles, is also to be applauded. Tutors on fast-moving, widely-recognised courses such as the CELTA should take note at this point: less on aspects such as phonology, please, and much more of Prodromou and Clanfield 2007. Without the latter there will be little else taking place of a constructive nature.

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