

Book Reviews

Multiple Intelligences in Secondary Education

Mario Rinvolutri and Herbert Puchta

Helbling Languages, 2005

www.heblinglanguages.com

Reviewed by Niki Joseph

This resource book is published by Helbling Languages and the authors are Herbert Puchta and Mario Rinvolutri. Many readers will already be familiar with their innovative teaching materials.

On the back cover we read that '*One of the secrets of teaching a foreign language successfully lies in balancing routine classroom work with innovative and creative activities and techniques*'. **Multiple intelligences in EFL** addresses the topic by essentially taking Howard Gardner's theories and providing some exercises for secondary and adult students in the ELT classroom.

It begins with a very clear and accessible overview and discussion of the frames of MI and clear examples of what they are. This is useful and necessary to understand the rest of the book. For me, section 3 was the most useful – What has this got to do with my teaching? Most readers will have attended sessions on MI at some point and/or read articles. However, this section, immediately gives a very clear example of teaching a linguistic area multi-intelligently. The authors take the area of punctuation – which for most students is fairly uninteresting and for teachers involves lots of reading up the night before! The example illustrates this linguistic area beautifully. Students are given a passage and told to work out a percussion system for the punctuation. Musical, kinaesthetic and interpersonal intelligences are appealed to and thus making it much easier for all to see that the punctuation is '*more than random salt and pepper on the page*' (page 17) I tried this activity out with a group of teenagers – aged 15 – 17 and it was a lovely way for me to make the point that English doesn't have as many commas as their own language and that full stops are used far more often.

This book is for secondary and adult learners. However, the MI theories are applicable across all age groups. Many primary books already weave these aspects into their courses – mainly perhaps, kinaesthetic, musical, linguistic and logical-mathematical. So these activities as such are not really suitable for low level young children. But this, I think, is the point – that as teachers of older/adult learners we tend to focus solely on the language/task and not the whole learner and their

different intelligences and ways of learning and remembering.

The introduction does also point out that reactions to the activities will be different to the one that you anticipated. The authors do not see this as an obstacle but rather as a challenge. 'These intriguing differences in the way the human brain works can become stimuli for discussions for individual thinking process, and learning from each other'.

The book is divided into 5 sections - Genral MI Exercises, Teaching from your coursebook, Looking out, Looking In, Self-Management and the quick reference guide at the back.

Section 1 – general MI Exercises is recommended for gaining a better idea of how the intelligences work. *The intelligences on holiday* is one that is recommended in which students are dictated questions about their holidays ranging from *Where were you? To what kind of light was there? What new sounds do you remember hearing?*

These questions are clearly addressing spatial and musical intelligence and I think that most students would be able to answer them. I'm not so sure about a final question though – Were there any moments when you felt really in harmony with the sky and the land and the place itself? Teachers need to know whether students in their setting would feel comfortable and therefore able to answer questions like these.

Teachers using this book will also need to be clear about their aims. The activities don't include linguistic aims as such – i.e. there is no 'present perfect' practice here. But nor should the book just be seen fluency activities. The activities and exercises can easily be integrated with any course. Personally, I feel that some activities will simply not work with students **unless** they have been prepared beforehand.

Thus perhaps the best section to begin with is the 'Teaching from your coursebook'. (**Section 2**). The example given above of punctuation is from that section.

Section 3 - Looking Out – focuses on interpersonal intelligences and there's a nice one about ambiguity in language. **Section 4** –Looking In. This part offers exercises for the students who '*sigh a little when asked , yet again, to work in pairs*'. (page 23) **Section 5** Self Management is for once the groups have warmed up to these kinds of activities and so know what they are all about.

I really liked the Teachers quick reference guide at the back - where in a double spread you can easily

find, for example, a kinaesthetic activity for your lower intermediate group.

An activity that took me back to my primary days is this one. Students have to use their spatial intelligence to work out phrases and words. Do you remember it??!

YY UR
YY UB
I C U R
YY 4 Me!

See solution on page 37

To sum up then this is a welcome book to add to the resource bookshelf and perhaps the beginning of a more systematic approach to addressing MI with learners.

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Writing with Children

Reilly J. & Reilly V.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005

Reviewed by Jason Renshaw

In their introduction to *Writing with Children*, the authors point out that “no one has produced a continuum of the developmental stages of writing for children learning English as a foreign or second language” and that “there is no theoretical model to follow at this time.” In writing this book, they have made very good headway on at least presenting a potential developmental continuum that can be referred to for the purposes of designing a principled and child-friendly writing curriculum for young EFL/ESL learners. The overall objective of the book is stated as being to “help teachers to guide children through the stages of writing to become confident independent writers.” In my opinion that aim is achieved, assisted with a very succinct student level system that is mindful of learners’ experience with writing in their first language and an approach encompassing six writing stages (pre-writing, letters, words, sentences, texts and poetry).

The bank of resources begins with the **pre-writing** level and introduces simple activities organized under the categories of “developing matching, categorizing, and observational skills”, “developing observational skills and memory”, and “from gross to fine motor skills.” Experienced YL teachers will find many of these activities familiar, but what is valuable here is that the explanations and variations provide clear links to how the activities promote future writing skills, and how they can be upgraded to apply them for letter and/or word recognition.

At the **letter** level, the authors first emphasize some

basic considerations for physically writing letters. It is, of course, unsurprising to see the activities in this section focus on areas such as “teaching the alphabet”, “writing the alphabet” and “alphabet recall.” For those unfamiliar with entry-level phonics reading and writing instruction, the activities and philosophy in this section would make an excellent starting point. If you have already taught phonics before, you may find some useful methods to add to your existing stock of classroom activities.

Heading into the **word** level activity bank, we find some important initial discussion about “word attack skills.” Quite appropriately (I feel), before launching into the activities for this level, they stress the importance of setting up a “literate” classroom, especially in terms of creating an appropriate physical environment in which young learners can be encouraged to develop their reading and writing. Word level writing activities are then launched under the categories “from reading to writing”, “making words memorable”, “onset and rime activities”, and “rhyming activities”.

Sentence level writing activities are first discussed in terms of the support children need as they write, how to make writing personal, and a pre-writing strategy the authors call “talking for writing”. These three issues appear to guide or underlie the activities that follow. In my experience, sentence level writing activities are already very well (perhaps even too well) addressed in the majority of young learner textbooks available on the market. However, if you feel that these approaches are too repetitive or one-dimensional, this section of the resource book will give you some valuable and creative alternatives to explore.

Moving into the fifth stage, **text** level writing activities are defined under “styles of writing”, in which the authors preview a range of genres including narration/stories, descriptions, letters, instructions, informational writing, research reports and persuasive writing. While the descriptions and guidelines for activities in this section are detailed and extensive, this is where I think the book pulled up a little short. The authors do note the importance of paragraphing main ideas in the introduction for this section, but most of the activities themselves do not emphasize this important consideration for text-level writing. More importantly, however, the bank of activities in this section appears brief. I would have liked to see some activities for writing emails in the “letters” section (rather than just “a greetings mat” and “post-it memos”), as it opens enormous opportunities for real-life communicative writing for children becoming increasingly familiar and comfortable with computers and technology. I also feel that text-level composition is more accessible to young learners than many are willing to admit, an impression that is echoed by the authors at the start of the book but not entirely followed up or promoted in this section of the resources. For teachers concentrating on the early and middle

young learner sectors, this is probably not an issue. However, teachers of late young learner ages getting ready for the transition to secondary schooling may well echo my sentiments here.

Then comes **poetry**. I think a good case is made when the authors answer their own question “why write poetry?” – not just in terms of learning to use features like alliteration, rhyme, metaphor, imagery, etc., but more practically when they point out that not all children find it easy to write prose and the shorter length of poems makes drafting and reviewing quicker and easier (to some extent). To be honest, I had not been a big advocate of poetry writing in my young learner classes, but the authors nabbed and converted me by the time I'd read through to “lantern poems”! This section of the book is really fantastic – if (like me) you had not considered poetry writing an option for your classes, please do take a look at these activities. They are amazing and I can't wait to try out several of them! I also very much liked the ideas for “publication” presented at the start of this section.

As a teacher and curriculum designer for young learners and teens in an East Asian context, where I have seen writing priorities go from nearly non-existent to almost all-encompassing over the past

three years in particular, I picked up this new resource book for teachers with eager fingers. The authors did not disappoint me. Thumbing through this disciplined, extremely well thought-out and presented bank of writing resources, I found several of my concerns about writing with children addressed and extended into new areas. While I personally feel that text level writing activities were not pursued as well as they might have been, overall I can safely say that this is an excellent and long-awaited resource book for an increasingly important area of EFL instruction to children.

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Solution: (Too wise you are/too wise you be/ see you are too wise for me)

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