‘This book is designed to develop both language and the ability to think’ (p. 6). It is not only the learners whose thinking skills will be extended by the use of this book but their teachers’ thinking skills as well.

The subheading for this title states that the photocopiable ELT activities in the book are designed to be used with learners aged 6–12.

There is much discussion of and a range of courses on developing thinking skills in the classroom and the role that thinking skills play in (children’s) learning. As Puchta and Williams say in their introduction:

. . . children need to acquire far more than factual knowledge prescribed by curricula. They need to leave school equipped to face the challenges of a changing and unpredictable world. (p. 6)

But for many teachers, translating what they read and know about thinking skills into practical classroom activities can be challenging. Teachers need look no further than this photocopiable resource book, which provides them with the range of practical activities they are looking for. In addition, and in my experience this is unique, the 13-page introduction is in itself a short course on thinking skills, providing its audience with a readable, informative synthesis of the theoretical underpinnings of thinking skills and of the book. The authors’ considerable experience in the field is evident throughout this introduction. The language remains accessible even when there is discussion of abstract notions. Many photocopiable resource books, as one would expect, focus primarily on the activities and limit their introductions to the practical and the technical. There are no such limitations in this introduction.

This book will appeal to teachers in primary and secondary schools, teachers in ESL or bilingual programmes, and teacher trainers. The less experienced teacher can easily access the activities, using the Quick Reference Guide at the back of the book. Once the teacher has chosen an activity, he/she will find the teaching notes clear and easy to follow. He/she can read the introduction either before using the activities or afterwards, perhaps when he/she notices the positive effects the activities are having on learners and their learning. A more experienced teacher may decide to read the introduction before using the activities in the book. He/she may also have enough experience to vary some of the activities in the ways that Puchta and Williams suggest, or even in other ways.

One of the more unusual aspects of this book is that it is also aimed at teacher trainers. The combined expertise of Puchta and Williams shows through in the scope and depth of the introduction, which explores what the thinking process is, whether it can be taught, the teacher’s role in developing thinking, the use of the mother tongue, and the role of errors. This book could easily form the core of a teacher development session or series of sessions with, as the authors suggest, the recommendation ‘to your trainees [of] some of the books we have listed in the bibliography’ (pp. 223–4). This extensive bibliography is another very important feature of this book.

Two sections of this introduction stand out for their clarity and accessibility when talking about the complex topic of thinking skills: ‘What is involved in the thinking process’ (pp. 10–11) and ‘The teacher’s role in teaching thinking’ (pp. 13–15).

‘What is involved in the thinking process’ presents the model of thinking skills on which the book is based: ‘we will focus on the model from The Somerset Thinking Skills Course developed by Blagg, Ballinger, and Gardner (2003). It is based on Feuerstein’s Instrumental Enrichment, and has guided the approach used in this book’ (p. 10).

There is extensive discussion and clarification of the terms ‘cognitive resources’ and ‘cognitive strategies’, with Nisbet and Shucksmith’s (1986) analogy of a soccer team cited as a helpful way of distinguishing between these two terms.

‘The teacher’s role in teaching thinking’ discusses key ways in which teachers can help their learners develop and extend their thinking skills. Areas covered are the following:

- the importance of accepting all learners’ contributions
- thinking time
- the teacher’s role as a listener
- the teacher as mediator
- scaffolding.

Indeed, the points covered in this section are underlying principles for teachers of young learners and are applicable to all teaching situations.
The 80 photocopiable activities are divided into 13 sections. The authors explain the rationale for these sections in the introduction, ‘13 categories of thinking [which] roughly follow a sequence from basic to higher order thinking skills’ (p. 11). The categories are: ‘Making comparisons’, ‘Categorising’, ‘Sequencing’ ‘Focusing attention’, ‘Memourising’, ‘Exploring space’, ‘Exploring time’, ‘Exploring numbers’, ‘Creating associations’, ‘Cause and effect’, ‘Making decisions’, ‘Solving problems’, and ‘Creative thinking’. Each section has its own full-page introduction, which explains why this thinking skill is important, gives examples of the thinking skill in practice, and links it to other thinking skills and, where relevant, to other sections in the book.

The contents page at the front of the book lists the activities under each of the 13 categories. In addition, at the back of the book, the authors have included a Quick Reference Guide that provides teachers with an easier way in to the activities. This Guide enables teachers to ‘select an activity suitable for your class based on the time you have available, the learning level(s), and age of your students and other factors such as thinking skills and language focus’ (p. 225). With this Guide, it is easy to find activities suitable, for example, for an elementary class with a focus on vocabulary. In the ‘How to use this book’ section of the introduction, the authors state that it is not the intention for the activities to be used sequentially but that teachers select activities suitable for their classes. This Quick Reference Guide will certainly enable teachers to do this effectively.

In terms of language level, activities range from ‘beginner/A1 upwards’ to ‘pre-intermediate/B1 upwards’. There are fewer activities at the ‘lower beginner/A1 upwards’ range, with the bulk of the activities falling within the ‘post-beginner/A1’ and ‘elementary/A2 upwards’ range. There are seven activities at the ‘pre-intermediate/B1 upwards’ level. It is important to have this range of language levels in the book, given the target contexts as referred to above. In the teaching notes for each activity, language levels are given as, for example, ‘post-beginner/A1 upwards’. In the Quick Reference Guide, only the terms ‘beginner’, ‘post-beginner’, ‘elementary’, and ‘elementary and above’ are used to describe level. It would have been useful to have also included the CEFR levels in the Quick Reference Guide as well for clarity.

The 13 sections of the book each contain between 4 and 11 activities. Teaching notes for the activities are clear and easy to follow, with age, language level, and time being specified, in addition to language focus and thinking skills. The authors often include ideas for varying or extending the activities and give answers where appropriate. Importantly, the authors often remind teachers that, by their very nature, some of the activities do not have one ‘right’ answer. Where activities require an auditory input, a short script is included in the teaching notes for teachers to read out. The page(s) of photocopiable material directly follow the teaching notes for each activity and are not set in a separate section at the back of the book. This makes it much easier for teachers to use.

As I worked my way through the activities, I encountered some that were familiar. However, I came across others that were new to me and really got me thinking. I was particularly interested in and by the section on ‘Focusing attention’. In their introduction to this section, Puchta and Williams talk about children these days being ‘easily distracted’ and how ‘a lack of ability to focus attention can lead to haphazard and unfocused responses and an inability to concentrate’ (p. 75). If we ask teachers these days, in both primary and secondary contexts, what the big difference they notice about today’s students is compared with students of even five years ago, many of them will talk about their students’ inability to focus or pay attention, or their short attention spans. Indeed, many teachers cite this as the main problem in their classes.

The four activities in this section will all be effective in narrowing learners’ attention down to the specific, whether it be something visual (Activities 1 and 2) or something aural, oral, and kinaesthetic (Activities 3 and 4). A useful project for trainees could be to develop more activities in this category, particularly for learners at A2/B1 level.

I had high expectations when I received this book for review, given the authors and the topic. I have not been disappointed. Learners will be engaged and challenged by the activities in this book. Teachers will find an easy-to-use book which, in addition to providing interesting and varied activities, offers them the opportunity of extending their own awareness and understanding of thinking skills and how to develop these in their learners.

References
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