

## *Language Learning Beyond the Classroom*

**Review by Cameron Romney**

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*Language Learning Beyond the Classroom*. David Nunan and Jack C. Richards, editors. ESL & Applied Linguistics Professional Series: Routledge. 2015. ISBN: 978-0-415-71315-3 (paperback). [Hardback and ebook editions also available.]

As part of the ESL & applied linguistics professional series by Routledge, this book is intended for teacher training and/or graduate programs, but there is much of interest for in-service teachers as well. The book is a collection of 29 edited chapters by 39 different authors on the topic of language learning outside of the traditional classroom based on the authors' experiences--primarily in both EFL and ESL situations--but also with non-English language learning contexts.

These chapters are arranged in five sections: involving the learner outside of the classroom, using technology and the Internet, learning through television, out-of-class projects, and interacting with native speakers. All chapters in the book are approximately 10 pages long and organized with the same five subsections: introduction and overview, vignette, principles, applications, payoffs and pitfalls. Additionally there are discussion questions, resource lists, and references for each chapter.

The chapters are largely written in an accessible style and because of the standardized organization, readers need not read the book chapter by chapter, but can refer to individual chapters on topics of interest, more like a reference book. The inclusion of a summary at the beginning of each chapter gives readers an overview of what is discussed, enabling them to quickly and easily decide which chapters might be applicable to their students and situation.

Some teachers might question the need for a volume like this, as they may consider classrooms the natural place for language learning to occur and non-classroom environments to be unsympathetic places where language learning is difficult (Benson & Reinders, 2011). Paradoxically, however, many teachers believe that without the opportunity to use language for authentic communicative purposes, learning can rarely progress beyond passive, receptive skills. Opportunities for au-

thentic communication abound outside of the classroom, making them, “an important compliment to classroom-based learning” (Benson & Reinders, 2011, p. xii). Indeed, an important role of any learner-centered teacher should be to prepare students for individualized, autonomous, interactive learning (Brown, 2007), which should include learning outside of the classroom.

The greatest strength of this volume is that the chapters are a collection of personal experiences of the authors and their students, and while many are research informed, they are not research. This is a strength because it allows for a very accessible reading style, often in the form of highly engaging narrative, that tells the successes, and occasional failures, of language learning outside of the classroom. It is easy for teachers to see how these opportunities might be implemented with his or her students.

However, it is a weakness because often the purposes for the activities are presented as common knowledge type assumptions without adequate substantiation, either in the form of references to research, or examples from the author’s experience. Furthermore, the learning outcomes are sometimes vague and/or general phenomena like an increase in vocabulary, or gains in student confidence, offered without adequate substantiation. The chapters relate what the learners did, but not always what they learned. It should be noted that this criticism does not apply equally to every chapter, as some chapters are better substantiated than others. Ultimately, it will be up to the reader to determine how accurate the assumptions are and therefore how appropriate each of the various activities presented are for his or her students.

Despite this weakness, this volume is highly recommended for teachers looking for new ways to help their students use the target language outside of class, even if for nothing more than to find more interesting, more creative and distinctive homework assignments, let alone self-directed, autonomous learning. It is also recommended for those teachers who are language learners themselves, as it offers several teacher-as-learner examples.

### References

- Benson, P. & Reinders, H. (2011). Introduction. In P. Benson and H. Reinders (Eds.) *Beyond the language classroom*, (pp. 1-6). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Brown, H. D. (2007). *Teaching by principals: an interactive approach to language pedagogy*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

#### **About the Reviewer**

*Cameron Romney has taught ESL/EFL in both the United States and Japan for the last 17 years. He holds an MA in Applied Linguistics from the University of Colorado at Denver. In 2015 he was employed as a Foreign Language Lecturer at Kyoto Sangyo University in Kyoto, Japan.*