

BOOK REVIEW
PEDAGOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON LEARNING LANGUAGES IN INSTRUCTED
SETTINGS
(2007, ED. J. USÓ AND M. N. RUIZ-MADRID)

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The field of foreign language teaching and learning has drawn the attention of many researchers and has therefore given rise to a huge amount of works on it. This does not mean, however, that everything has been covered, on the contrary, there is still a great deal of relevant and useful information to be found and evident proof of this is the book *Pedagogical Reflections on Learning Languages in Instructed Settings*.

The editors of this volume have brought together 15 chapters which make relevant contributions to the field of language learning in instructed settings. The book is composed of five sections the chapters of which can be said to build a bridge for language teachers and comply fully with the objectives of the editors: to provide language teachers with the pedagogical reflections derived from research in the field of language learning and to present the variety of pedagogical implications that stem from such research. Indeed, it constitutes a valuable guide for those who approach the classroom context with the aim of helping learners to learn foreign languages.

Section I of the book provides a theoretical overview of the past and present of methodologies and approaches in language learning providing a state of the art based on an agile and useful review of the reigning panorama in the field of foreign language learning and teaching from the 60s. Special attention is placed on aspects such as eclecticism, the socio-constructivist paradigm, the communicative approach and autonomous language learning. The section serves as the theoretical ground for the rest of the book and gives way to the reflections and pedagogical implications presented in the subsequent chapters. Chapters 1 and 3 are strongly recommended: chapter 1 by Villanueva comprises a beautiful review of the different methodologies and approaches to foreign language learning, whereas chapter 3 offers all we can expect from prominent authors in the field of language learning autonomy such as Riley and Duda.

From the past to present and future, section II offers the reader three interesting works on highly topical issues. Foreign language teachers are strongly recommended to read chapter 4 on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in language learning and chapter 6 which deals with the Portfolio for languages. The integration of ICT in language learning is wonderfully dealt with by Ruiz-Madrid and Sanz-Gil who, pivoting on the concept of learner autonomy, discuss the new roles that all the agents involved should play in order to make the most of the possibilities afforded by the ICT. On the other hand, the chapter on the portfolio is very illustrative and helpful to get to know what this new language assessment tool really involves. The author covers theory and practice about the portfolio talking about its functions and parts and presenting different ways of implementing it, using as an example the Spanish one which was designed for learners from 12 to 18.

As it happens in the rest of the volume, the chapters contained in section III deal with topics highly concerned with the language learner. Perusing this section, the reader learns the importance of seemingly small issues which decades ago did not seem to play a role in the learning process but which, in fact, can make the difference between a tense and a relaxed environment for learning to take place. As Arnold states “an anxious classroom is toxic”.

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Thus, in chapter 7 this author addresses the issue of affect and the factors it involves such as anxiety, self-concept, emotional engagement and learning styles. Learning styles are also the main issue of chapter 8, but in this case, more specifically Chapelle and Cárdenas-Claros focus on one cognitive style, field independence /field dependence in relation to CALL. Undoubtedly, the issue of learning styles is primal in a learner-centred approach to language learning and in this sense it would deserve a more illuminating and comprehensive chapter instead of one which focuses on just one learning style. Moreover, the chapter contains quite dated references. Section III ends with an appealing paper by Manchón which again deals with a topic strongly related with the characteristics and preferences of language learners which, at the same time is essential in the language learning process. The author of this chapter concentrates on language learning and language use strategies and offers a well organised review of research from the point of view of theory, research and pedagogy. She then ascertains some instructional implications derived from research from both an epistemological and an applied perspective and offers examples of studies which focus on the relationship between strategy training and L2 development. An interesting debate arises from this chapter regarding the positive benefits of strategy training in language learning instructed settings.

With such a title, this volume could not afford to ignore the four language skills and, in fact, section IV is almost entirely devoted to this topic. The section contains 5 chapters and the first four focus on perspectives on teaching each language skill: listening (chapter 10), speaking (chapter 11), reading (chapter 12) and writing (chapter 13). When reaching this section, the reader probably expects to find proposals to help improve the four abilities in the language classroom. However, this does not happen in all the chapters included in the section. As an example, chapter 10 on teaching listening offers too much literature review and in general too much theory and forgets to give specific examples that can help teachers improve the listening abilities of their students. An opposite example would be chapter 13 on teaching writing where authors are very much concerned about the right way to teach students to write a text in a foreign or second language. Thus, their main objectives are to find variables that are responsible for differences among successful and unsuccessful learners and to show the way to improve the writing abilities of students. In addition, Palmer-Silveira and Ruiz-Garrido offer plenty of helpful examples to generate text in the foreign language classroom. Finally, Bocanegra puts the finishing touch to the section with an outstanding paper on the perpetually complex topic of assessment. The following words by the author clearly state the need to cater for evaluation and the lack of awareness that usually surrounds this issue: “Assessing teaching and learning environments and outcomes is a pedagogical and social practice closely related to the teaching profession but all too frequently overlooked by works concerned with language teaching methodology and language teacher training” (p. 293).

The last section of the book is called ‘Concluding Remarks’ and is composed by only one chapter which deals with integrated approaches to foreign language learning. This chapter can be seen as a practical application that takes into consideration the common deficiencies and problems students face when they enter their workplaces which demand a ‘real’ command of the foreign language. The chapter proves to be a very suitable finishing piece for the volume bridging the gap between the instructed settings and their subsequent natural step such as the incorporation of students to the labour market.

In sum, this volume is comprehensive, well written and well knit together as an in-depth examination of many key aspects of foreign language learning and teaching and it will, therefore, constitute a helpful tool for language teachers.