



The Art of Teaching Spanish: Second Language Acquisition from Research to Praxis. Book review.

Author

Eisenclas, Susana

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The Art of Teaching Spanish: Second Language Acquisition from Research to Praxis

Edited by RAFAEL SALABERRY AND BARBARA A. LAFFORD

Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006

Reviewed by Susana Eisenclas, *Griffith University*

As indicated in the preface, this book is intended as a companion volume to *Spanish Second Language Acquisition: State of the Science*, coedited by Barbara Lafford and Rafael Salaberry and published by Georgetown University Press in 2003. While the first volume consisted of critical reviews of the field of second language acquisition processes and products, the present volume ‘explores the extent to which the *art* of teaching L2 Spanish has been informed by the scientific (theoretical and empirical) research on SLA (and other related field)’ (p.xi).

The relationship between SLA and foreign language pedagogy is not straightforward, and often ‘theorists’ and ‘practitioners’ seem to be unaware of the issues and challenges facing one another. This volume attempts to bridge the gap and ‘translate’ theoretical frameworks and research findings into curriculum design and classroom practice. As such, it is a welcome addition to the field and would be of great use to academics involved in designing and delivering language programs. Although the focus is on Spanish instruction, teachers of other languages will find these studies and proposals equally stimulating.

This book provides a snapshot of the main areas in the field of second/foreign language teaching. It consists of a preface and 11 chapters written by established scholars in each of the areas. Topics covered include foreign language across curriculum programs (Klee and Barnes-Karol), curriculum design (Collentine), theoretical considerations underlying classroom practice (VanPatten & Leaser; Negueruela and Lantolf), the effects of study abroad and classroom contexts on learning (Lafford and Collentine), online learning (Blake and Delforge), testing (Salaberry and Cohen), the incorporation of linguistic variation into the classroom (Gutiérrez and Fairclough), teaching heritage language learners (Valdés) and SLA and the teaching of translation (Colina).

A thorough overview of the collection is given in chapter 1 (Salaberry and Lafford), which summarises each chapter and highlights its main contributions. While all chapters were reviewed, VanPatten and Leaser’s proposal (chapter 4) was singled out for harsh criticism. I found this practice unprecedented, as presumably authors were asked to contribute to the volume and had no opportunities to reply.

Chapter 1 further highlights five main themes shared by most contributors to the volume. The common themes identified include (1) the rejection of the notion of a monolithic language competence, an assumption that is at odds with the multifaceted nature of language competence among Spanish speakers and the diversity of cultural and linguistic practices they exhibit; (2) the rejection of a decontextualized view of linguistic competence in favour of a situated view of language as social practice; (3) the reconceptualisation of the psycholinguistic component of SLA; (4) the need to seek language learning opportunities outside the classroom; and (5) the need for more communication and cross fertilisation of ideas among SLA researchers, materials and curriculum developers, teachers and the wider target language speaking community.

Having been involved in language teaching myself, I particularly valued the proposals to expand the limitations of the class by involving the target language community, thus exposing learners not only to the richness of the linguistic variation found in Spanish speaking communities but also to the opportunities to experience 'language as social practice' and authentic interactions. In light of the current plight of university language programs in Australia, which is resulting in the need to reduce contact hours across language majors, these proposals become even more relevant and may be the only way of guaranteeing that learners get enough exposure to the target language.

In sum, this is a thought provoking collection that does a very effective job at translating theory into practice, clearly explaining research proposals and analysing how the finding can be operationalised into classroom practice. It gives a good overview of the challenges and issues involved in teaching foreign languages in contemporary multilingual societies. Furthermore, it provides language teachers with a tool for reflection on curriculum design and teaching practices. As such, it is a highly recommended resource.

References

Lafford B & Salaberry R 2003 *Spanish Second Language Acquisition: State of the Science* Georgetown University Press Washington, DC.