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A Handbook for TEFL. Edited by N. McLaren and D. Madrid. Alcoy, Spain: Marfil, 1996, pp. 550.

Codifying the knowledge and practices that comprise a field of enquiry is, perhaps, both an assertion and an acknowledgement of its status as a discipline. In the case of applied linguistics, there have been a number of attempts at such codification, beginning with Halliday, Strevens and McIntosh *The Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching* in 1964 and continuing through Corder's excellent *Introducing Applied Linguistics* (1973), the *Edinburgh Course in Applied Linguistics* edited by Allen and Corder (1974-8), Stern's *Fundamental Concepts in Language Teaching* (1983), Van Els *et al.*'s *Applied Linguistics and the Learning and Teaching of Foreign Languages* (1984) to *Teaching English as a Second or a Foreign Language* (1991) edited by Celce-Murcia. The *Handbook for TEFL* edited by Neil McLaren and Daniel Madrid of the University of Granada belongs to this tradition. Like the Celce-Murcia book it consists of a number of essays on key aspects of applied linguistics and language pedagogy, written by different authors, all currently working in Spain.

It is, however, becoming increasingly difficult to write a 'state-of-the-art' book. This is because applied linguistics and language pedagogy now involve such a wide range of enquiry that it is difficult to do justice to all the strands within the covers of a single book. Consequently, the nineties have witnessed an increasing tendency for specialist books dealing with particular aspects of the field. We now have separate books on SLA, teaching grammar, teaching vocabulary, contrastive rhetoric, listening, speaking, reading, writing, interlanguage pragmatics, syllabus design, materials development, second/foreign language teacher education, computer assisted language learning, teacher cognition etc. How can a single book do justice to such a wide body of enquiry? Should such a book be attempted?

In fact, difficult though such a book is to design and write, I think there is still a need for it. First, teachers cannot be expected to buy a whole library in order to familiarize themselves with current thinking in applied linguistics/language pedagogy. Second, there is a need to select from the accumulated knowledge that which is relevant to a particular teaching context. Third, surveys of the field can play a major role in helping to make specialist knowledge accessible to teachers by ensuring that it is presented in a manner that they will be able to understand.

A Handbook for TEFL is representative of current thinking in applied linguistics/language pedagogy and, as such, can lay claim to being a 'state-of-the-art' compendium. It reflects the various strands of enquiry that make up this new discipline - the social context of language teaching (Chapter 1), psychological dimensions of learning and the learner (Chapter 2), second language acquisition

research (Chapter 3), general aspects of pedagogy as they apply to language teaching (Chapters 4 and 5), the concept of 'method' in language teaching (Chapter 6), syllabus design (Chapter 7), the four language skills (Chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11), linguistic and communicative competence and language teaching (Chapters 12, 13 and 14), specific language teaching techniques (Chapters 15 and 16), teaching literature (Chapter 17) and testing and assessment (Chapter 18). The book, therefore, is very comprehensive. Perhaps the only major area not adequately covered is that of the 'teacher as researcher'¹. I would have liked to see a final chapter that addresses ways in which teachers can take on the role of evaluators of the various proposals advanced throughout the book through 'insider research'. Without such guidance, there is a danger that teachers will become consumers of applied linguistics rather than reflective practitioners who experiment with new ideas.

Of course, the depth of treatment of the different areas included in the book varies considerably. A number of the chapters constitute excellent accounts of past and current work. I particularly liked the chapters on the foreign language teacher and the foreign language classroom (both by Madrid), the chapter on foreign language teaching methods (Sierra), the chapter on syllabus design (Zaro), the chapter on listening comprehension (McLaren), on reading (Bruton) and on writing (Bueno). I also found the two chapters on practical issues (games and songs by Bestard Monroig and audio-visual and technical resources by Salaberri Ramiro) very helpful. These chapters, in particular, I will want to make use of in my own work with teachers. Other chapters I found less helpful, although this may reflect my own particular biases. For example, I was disappointed to find the chapter on learning foreign languages by Valcárcel, Coyle and Verdú make no reference to research in SLA on form-focussed instruction, an area of enquiry that would seem to be of direct relevance to language pedagogy. In Chapter 9, "Oral Communication", I expected to find a detailed description of and a rationale for the various types of 'communicative tasks' that can be used to stimulate oral interaction in the classroom but instead found more space devoted to techniques for teaching pronunciation, which, I would of thought, belonged more to the chapter dealing with linguistic competence. Task-based language teaching is dealt with elsewhere in the book (e.g. in Chapter 7) but nowhere is there an adequate typology of tasks or an explicit account of the methodological procedures for making use of them. I was also somewhat disappointed with the treatment of grammar teaching. This is dealt with in Chapter 12 by Pérez Martín but in a way that is, frankly, contradictory and unhelpful. At one point Martín claims "there is a simple methodology for teaching grammar" (p. 324), which turns out to be "explaining" grammatical structures. Later, however, Martín adopts the traditional 'PPP' (present-practice - produce) sequence. What are teachers to make of this? What exactly is the place of grammar teaching in communicative language teaching? What is missing here is a sense of the various options for teaching grammar (which go far beyond 'explaining' and 'PPP') and how a 'focus on form' can be effectively integrated into a

language program that emphasizes meaning. It is perhaps inevitable that in a book made up of the contributions of a large number of authors, some unevenness will be found. In general, though, the treatments of the different areas are informed, balanced and useful.

The greatest strength of this book lies in the attempt to relate the general field of applied linguistics to the particular needs of teachers of English in Spain. Spain has been undergoing educational reform in the nineties. New principles have been identified to guide education, including foreign language education (e.g. the emphasis on 'procedures' rather than 'concepts' as the major goal) and new types of syllabuses have been developed. *A Handbook for TEFL* was specifically written to address these reforms. It will assist teachers - both pre-service and in-service - to come to a fuller understanding of how general educational principles can be translated into classroom practice. Top-down educational reforms of the kind undertaken by Spain can easily founder for a number of reasons. The new principles may conflict with teachers' own beliefs about education. They may not be fully understood. They may be understood but ineffectively implemented because teachers lack the kinds of practical expertise required. One way in which these problems can be overcome is by communities of scholars and practitioners pooling their expertise. *A Handbook for TEFL* constitutes an attempt to bring to bear work in applied linguistics and language pedagogy to explicate and flesh out the reforms. In nearly every chapter of the book, a specific attempt is made to demonstrate how theoretical and practical ideas relate to the reforms. In this respect, then, the book is timely and the contributors have done a real service to their country.

The third reason I gave for a survey work on applied linguistics and language pedagogy was the need to make theory and research accessible to teachers. To what extent has this been achieved in *A Handbook for TEFL*? Given that the book was intended primarily as a resource for Spanish teachers of English, one might have expected it to be written in Spanish. I have no doubt that a similar book written for French teachers of English would have been published in French. However, it seems to me both brave and right that the editors opted for English. In doing so, they are making an important statement; teachers of English need not only to be able to teach English but to learn to teach and to think about teaching in English. There are several points in the book where different authors emphasize the need for English to be used as the medium of communication in English lessons and not just as the pedagogic goal. Such an argument, which I believe to be entirely right, is only convincing if it is made in English.

Nevertheless, the decision to publish in English does raise problems of accessibility. Applied linguistics is full of technical language ('jargon' in the eyes of some) and this can prove daunting to teachers who are not familiar with the register. Thus, great care is needed to define key terms explicitly and to write in a manner that makes abstract ideas clear. Attempts have been made to ensure that *A Handbook for TEFL* is reader-friendly. Key terms are printed in bold. Many of the chapters make use of boxes that help to high-light key points. These are often very helpful, although there are also dangers in

simply listing points - particular points may not be properly explained and illustrated and sometimes contradictions arise². Most of the chapters include activities for teachers to work through, which will help them grapple with the key ideas. Many of these activities are thoughtfully devised and provoking (e.g. those at the ends of Chapters 5, 6 and 8). Some, however, seem to have been tossed off without a great deal of thought. Another feature of the book which contributes to its readability is the repetition of key ideas across chapters. For example, the same information relating to 'learning strategies' and Canale's model of 'communicative competence' can be found in several different chapters. As a native-speaker reader I found this somewhat irritating but on further reflection I can see that it may be of value to the second language reader. In these ways, then, the editors have tried to shape a book that is accessible to the intended readership.

Inevitably, however, some of the chapters may prove very difficult for Spanish teachers of English. For example, Chapter 1, by Vez, which in many respects is an excellent account of how social factors impinge on foreign language learning and teaching, is very densely written and does not seem to have been directed at the readership described in the editors' introduction. Although it is logical to begin with the "social context" it is unfortunate, perhaps, that the readers are confronted with such a demanding article at the beginning of the book. I think, too, more could have been done to make this handbook more of a book and less a collection of papers. There is no glossary, for example. More seriously, there is no index. I found the absence of the latter particularly disappointing in that it denied me the opportunity to look up key topics (e.g. *comprehensible input*) and see what different authors had made of it. I would strongly recommend that, if a second edition is prepared, an index be added.

A Handbook for TEFL is a worthy attempt to produce a 'state-of the art' account of applied linguistics/language pedagogy for Spain. It has the strengths and weaknesses of a collection of papers by different authors. It is wide-ranging, affords a variety of perspectives and makes the issues relevant to the Spanish context. However, the treatment of the different areas is uneven and the style of writing even more so. I know of no book on the market that meets the needs of pre-service and in-service teachers in Spain more fully and expect it to be widely used.

A final observation - as an occasional visitor to Spain over the years, I have been privileged to see interest in applied linguistics gather steam. *A Handbook for TEFL* is a testimony to the intellectual vigour and vibrancy of applied linguistics in Spain. As such, it is a noteworthy and important book.

NOTES

1. Daniel Madrid does touch on the 'reflective teacher movement' in Chapter 4. What is missing, in my view, is a practical account of how teachers can become reflective through various kinds of action research.

2. An example of an apparent contradiction brought about by simply listing points can be found on page 172 in the discussion of the "structuralist method". Figure 8 lists the criticisms of this method, including the claim that "slight treatment is given to syntactic relations". However, in another list dealing with the positive contributions of structuralist methods, which is found immediately below Figure 8, the reader is told 'they emphasized syntactic progression'. What should a reader make of this?

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