

C. Kirsch. *Teaching Foreign Languages in the Primary School*.

London: Continuum. 2008. Pp. 224.

The policy to introduce (foreign) language programs at primary school level is now well established in many parts of the world. However, these policies have not always been accompanied by the requisite level of training and support for the teachers charged with their implementation.

Teaching Foreign Languages in the Primary School is designed as a resource for training and practising Modern Foreign Languages (herein language) teachers. The book manages to cover a lot of territory, combining the research literature, case studies and the author's own experience as a classroom teacher to produce a text which should be highly accessible and appealing to this audience. It also manages to strike an appropriate balance between theory and practice: it introduces the key theories and traditions and encourages teachers to reflect on how theory and beliefs about Second Language Acquisition and pedagogy may inform their own practices. At the same time it provides plenty of practical ideas and examples for them to use in their own classrooms.

The first chapter sets the scene with an overview of the political context for language study at primary school level. While the main focus is language policy in the UK, there are also brief descriptions of the policies governing language provision in Europe, the United States, Australia and China.

Chapter 2 comprises case studies of two schools, each with high intakes of non-native English speaking children, with "effective and enjoyable" (p.19) programs. While there is plenty of evidence that these schools were successful on a number of measures, it would have been helpful to include discussion of the stated goals of the respective language programs and how these related to the policies outlined in Chapter 1. In some respects it might have been better to introduce this chapter later in the book so that the schools' practices could be framed in relation to the relevant Second Language Acquisition and learning theories as well as to the research on 'good practice'.

Chapters 3 and 4 are the 'theory' chapters. Chapter 3 presents the three main traditions in second language acquisition research (behaviourist, cognitive and sociocultural) and their various offshoots as well as their implications for language teaching. Chapter 4 provides an historical overview of language teaching pedagogy from 'grammar translation' to 'task-based instruction' and the theoretical underpinnings of each approach. Both chapters are written in a

highly accessible manner and include helpful summaries of the main ideas and shortcomings of each theory or approach. The concepts covered in these chapters are used to frame discussion over the remainder of the book.

Chapter 5 presents the results of a longitudinal ethnographic study of six 'ordinary and working-class' children over the course of two years of schooling (years 4 and 5). It draws on data from students, parents and teachers to document language use and learning and argues for the need for teachers to take greater account of what is taking place outside of the school context (home, other activities). Interestingly, while the target school had adopted a "sensitization approach" which aims to "develop positive attitudes and to raise children's awareness of languages and cultures" (p.75) the children's vision of how languages should be taught included "both language acquisition and formal language learning" (p.78).

Chapters 6 to 11 are the 'how to' chapters. 'Introducing children to foreign languages' (Chapter 6) addresses topics such as the physical setting, use of the target language, planning (including a lesson plan template) and teaching across the curriculum. It also provides practical suggestions for teaching activities (puppets, rhyme, songs and games) and a section on working with stories. Importantly, the chapter ends with a reminder that teaching needs to be goal focused rather than "[s]imply stringing together isolated 'fun activities'" (p.100).

Chapters 7 to 11 cover approaches to teaching the four macro-skills (listening and speaking, reading and writing), grammar, intercultural competence and language learning strategies respectively and include explanations of the theories informing different approaches as well as practical examples and resources.

The final chapter looks at the issues of assessment, continuity and transition. It begins by challenging the belief, common amongst primary language teachers, that introducing assessment will somehow mar students 'enjoyment' of the subject. While acknowledging the only statutory requirement in the UK is that students exit primary school with a 'recognised level' of the language the author emphasises the importance of assessment for continuity within programs as well as for the transition to secondary school. The chapter covers issues such as the importance of sharing goals with students, effective questioning technique and involving students in assessment. It also introduces some of the relevant external reporting frameworks such as the European Language Portfolio. However, there are fewer suggestions and examples than in some of the previous chapters, which is unfortunate given teachers often lack

confidence in this area of the curriculum. For example, it would have been helpful to provide more detailed information about how teachers could develop their own criteria and rubrics and the section on feedback could have addressed issues such as the effect of different types of feedback on motivation and learning.

The book is easy to navigate, using techniques such as advance organisers ('Food for thought') at the beginning of each chapter as well as summaries (e.g., 'main ideas', 'shortcomings' and 'implications for teaching') at the end of each section and/or chapter. However, what should make this book particularly appealing is its recognition of the many constraints schools face in delivering a language program, not least of all the availability of suitably qualified teachers. This pragmatism is captured by the following quote:

What type of model teachers choose depends on their philosophy of education; their foreign languages; their teaching experience; their own level of competence and confidence in the target language, the philosophy of the school, and above all, the pupil's needs. (p.116)

This non-prescriptive approach, along with the provision of detailed case studies and teaching activities, will help to ensure the book's relevance to a broad range of teaching contexts. It is also consistent with the author's expressed hope that the book will encourage current and prospective primary school language teachers in the belief that "I can do it" (p.32).

Review by Kathryn Hill

The University of Melbourne