

Book reviews

Postmethod pedagogies applied in ELT formal schooling: Teachers' voices from Argentine classrooms

Edited by Silvana Barboni. La Plata: Argentine ELT Innovation, 2012, ISBN 978-987-28082-0-4 (pbk), Pp. 133

This book edited by Silvana Barboni shows the theory behind post-method pedagogies being put into practice in state education institutions by English teachers from the National University of La Plata, Argentina. It is the collaborative work of teachers who do not only share their teaching sequences and handouts used by students at primary and secondary schools in the Argentinian context, but who also reflect upon their experiences linking them to theory, and thus reaching praxis. Authors included are: Anabel Alarcón, Maria Marta Bordenave, Ana Cendoya, Maria Fernanda Crespi, Maria Verónica Di Bin, Alejandra Favini, Julia Garbi, Pia Isabella, Marcela Jalo, Mariana Palmieri and Mercedes Peluffo.

The book is divided into three sections: Parts A, B and C clearly outlined in the foreword by the editor. Part A authored by Barboni provides the rationale through the presentation of some ELT theoretical perspectives on teaching and learning stemming from post-method pedagogies. First there is a reference to the role of English as the language of international communication and literary masterpieces; then the author also traces ELT back to its history of colonialism and linguistic imperialism, questioning its role as a lingua franca or *frankensteinia* (Phillipson, 2008). In Argentina historically legitimized practices of *otherization* (Barboni & Porto, 2011; Varela et al., 2010) used to place native speakers in a superior position to non-native speakers and this resulted in “homogenization of practices” (Barboni, 2012, p.10) that followed methods which did not take into account our students' identities or socio-cultural contexts for teaching and learning and reproduced exclusion of students and deprofessionalization of teachers whose role was reduced to that of technicians.

This dissatisfaction with methods and the transmission model of education led to the

“imperative need to construct a postmethod pedagogy” (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 537) along a three-dimensional system where the parameters of particularity, practicality and possibility may foster the advent of context-sensitive language education that respects local linguistic, sociocultural and political particularities. These post-method pedagogies advocated by the authors of this book help break “the reified role relationship of theorists and practitioners by enabling teachers to produce their own theory and practice” (Kumaravadivelu, op.cit.). They have also brought about sociopolitical awareness in teachers and students as participants of dialogic mediation practices that respect the social identities of learners. Such practices make them conscious of the role of power in social interactions between native and non-native speakers in order to allow for emancipatory practices that are co-constructed in learning communities.(Johnson, 2009).

This book shares materials produced by English teachers that cater for the needs of heterogeneous groups of students in diverse contexts of our territory (Gandolfo, 2008) studying English at primary and secondary state schools. The book addresses the cultural dimension of learning and the diversity of voices present in the English language around the world. The epistemological assumptions of teachers are taken into account as they reflect critically upon their practices through enquiry-based teacher learning and they theorize providing value to the creative task of teaching and becoming engaged in communities of practice within a sociocultural perspective (Johnson, 2009). The teaching sequences and handouts present in sections B and C of this book are regarded as specific genres and symbolic artifacts that “operate as powerful documents for the interpretive eye to understand teacher thinking and innovation in class” (Barboni, 2012, p.5).

In Part B of this book there are teaching sequences for the primary school level. Each teaching sequence is preceded by questions that prompt reflection. The first handout by Pia Isabella shows a teaching sequence for second form students around the topic of peace and develops values for citizenship such as the right to live in peace and respect for other cultures. As in most of the handouts the lessons are centered on literature for children, in this case *Me on the map* by Joan Sweeney and *Can you say peace?* by Karen Katz. Other authentic materials sources such as websites for videos are provided together with ideas to develop project-based work and examples of students’ productions. After each of the teaching sequences there is a section called *The theory behind it*. In this case Julia Garbi reflects on the importance of intercultural and plurilingual education for a world of diversity. She concludes that an intercultural perspective engages learners in dialogue with others, helps them forge their own identities and questions naturalized and stereotyped thought (Byram et al., 2001).

The second teaching sequence for primary education develops values such as love

and friendship through the poem *Friends* by Jill Eggleston, chants and project work. Linguistic exponents for the first form include physical characteristics of animals, colours, numbers, feelings and emotions. The reflection upon *The theory behind it* is based on the importance of scaffolding from a socio-constructivist perspective and is developed by Mercedes Peluffo. The third teaching sequence designed by Fernanda Crespi and Pia Isabella centers on May Revolution Day and pupils play games based on a story about *Tommy and the time machine*. *The theory behind it* is authored by Maria Marta Bordenave who relates Kumaravadivelu's strategic framework to the design of teaching materials that are sensitive to the learners' experiences and respectful of their own socio-cultural and historical backgrounds and thus engages students in meaningful interaction through English as a foreign language.

Also within Part B, Mariana Palmieri develops a collaborative storytelling task centered on *The Three Little Pigs*. Children make use of finger puppets and the teacher uses a retelling chart to help them dramatize the story. Alejandra Favini analyzes this teaching sequence by focusing on the importance of using authentic texts and materials that foster interactive discourse practices that depart from the traditional structurally-based texts. She claims that using traditional stories in the English Foreign Language class helps learners develop critical thinking skills and build literacy (Cameron, 2001).

In Part C the authors present teaching sequences used as secondary school experiences. The first handout was developed by Ana Cendoya for 1st Year secondary schools, around the topic of the natural world and the project makes use of ICT. The theoretical reflection by Marcela Jalo is centered on the importance of the use of technology in the classroom taking advantage of the *Conectar Igualdad* programme for secondary schools in Argentina. The importance of using internet-based project work for encouraging critical thinking skills, developing cross-curricular and interdisciplinary projects and fostering cooperative learning is enhanced as students of different learning styles may profit from them (Dudenev & Hockley, 2007). Jalo also presents a teaching handout that exploits interactive reading and genre analysis. Students are expected to engage in an ICT task-based project as a follow up to share their understanding of the text and produce their own linguistic output to be presented to an audience by making use of Movie Maker or Glogster posters. María Verónica Di Bin presents the theory behind it and relates the main concepts of post-method pedagogy to the importance of adapting materials to suit specific learning contexts and to fit particular learners' needs. She also stresses the importance of including a variety of texts and genres in class so as to develop multi-literacy skills: "teachers need to help learners develop the capacity to produce, read and interpret spoken, print and multimedia texts to become multiliterate persons" (Di Bin, 2012, p. 100). She also reflects about the importance of using focused and unfocused tasks (Ellis, 2003) built around those texts since tasks in contrast with

traditional grammar exercises provide an ideal context to let students work with the three dimensions of language: ideational, textual and interpersonal (Halliday, 1978).

Silvana Barboni presents a teaching sequence *Tales of Terror in the News* aimed at students in 3rd Year that provides students with elements of text organization and text-signaling much needed to help them improve reading skills. Anabel Alarcón expands on the theory behind it by stressing the importance of a genre-based approach (Swales, 1990) to expose students to different genres that will be reading requirements at higher levels of education.

The last teaching sequence for 6th Year secondary schools designed by Anabel Alarcón provides a highly-motivating topic for teenagers as it deals with images and articles connected with beauty, anorexia and related issues. They can develop rich vocabulary about physical appearance and personality and provide opinions as they engage in the analysis of images, songs and texts. Ana Cendoya presents an insightful analysis on the visual literacy perspective based on Callow (2008) that stresses the importance of teaching and learning how to interpret different semiotic systems in a multiliterate society.

This book is essential to EFL teacher educators and is one of *the* books that English language teachers should read to understand the new trends in curricular design for foreign languages in our country. Its rich materials and pedagogically sound frameworks provide an innovative and empowering guide for ELT professionals.

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