

Recensiones

Teaching English to Children - Interactivity and Teaching Strategies in the Primary FL Classroom. Yvette Coyle, Mercedes Verdú, Marisol Valcárcel.

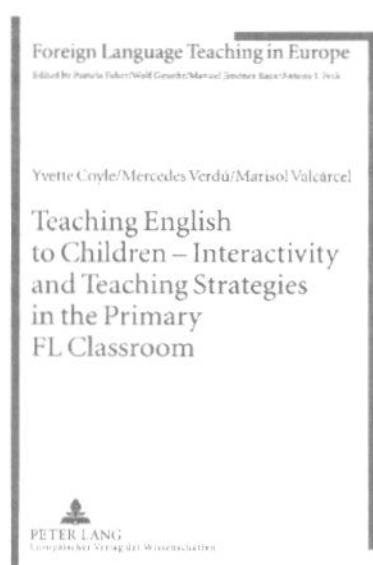
José Luis Ortega Martín, Javier Villoria Prieto
Universidad de Granada

In this book, the fifth volume of the collection Foreign Language Teaching in Europe, which comes endorsed by having among its editors to researchers such as Pamela Faber, we find a study that, according to its authors, arose in direct response to the uncertainty with which many teachers and teacher trainers faced the 1990 Reform of the Spanish Educational System. At the same time, there was a lack of empirical research into the teaching/learning process of foreign languages in 11-14 year old learners that made necessary a research which 'might shed some light on the issues involved'.

The teaching of a foreign language must be concerned with creating situations within the classroom in which the language is used in a contextualized way. Besides that, the teacher must know how to organize and structure the classroom activities in order to encourage the students' autonomous use of the FL.

This study takes as a starting point the constructivist framework of the teaching/learning process by means of which, as it is indicated in the Official Curriculum, 'language learning is to be understood as a process of creative construction in which the learner, using the natural strategies at his disposition, formulates hypotheses about the foreign language from the input received in the classroom in order to elaborate the rules which make up an internal representation of the new linguistic system'. This interaction between the teacher and the student will be the axis of this investigation as well as the importance conceded to the input received in the classroom will be determinant for the quality of the child's construction of FL knowledge.

The authors observe and try to understand the teaching/learning process in two primary



school classrooms (3^o and 4^o) during two consecutive years in order to analyse how these two groups of children learn the FL as a result of the help they receive from their teacher and if a) it is possible to find evidence that the different forms of organization and sequencing of the classroom interactivity can influence the degree of autonomy reached by the students in the use of the foreign language, as well as if b) there are indicators of the ways in which the teacher helps and guides the students' construction of FL knowledge.

The research is divided into four chapters distributed as follows: 1. theoretical background, contextualization of the study within a sociocultural framework and construction of the knowledge in the FL classroom; 2. data collection and procedures of its analysis; 3. results for both levels of analysis being specially significant the results obtained from the oral assessment interview carried out with a selection of students from the two groups; 4. conclusions and suggestions for the initial teaching/learning of a FL in a classroom context. From these conclusions we highlight that 'teaching should not be seen as a question of transmitting the language to the students as if it were a corpus of information to be learned, (...) teaching should be understood as a process in which the teacher works together with the children to share and develop their understanding and use of the new language' (p. 287).

The final conclusion is adamant: students from Primary public schools are helped 'by providing (them) with contextualized input of a high quality, and by fostering and supporting the children's developing understanding and use of the FL in situations of collaborative interaction in which knowledge is jointly constructed through meanings created *in the FL*.'

We can state that we are in front of a thorough investigation that basis its conclusions on an excellent empiric study. Its 308 pages are a compulsory reading if we want to understand the *Reforma*. This in-depth investigation as well as the revision of the literature related with the teaching and learning of foreign languages makes this work one of the most relevant in this field. It is a book of great interest to teachers not only of English but of any other foreign language, teacher trainers and student teachers since it offers both theoretical reflection and methodological insights for all those involved in teaching English to children.