Foreign Language Education and its Cross-Curricular Links

(Book Review)

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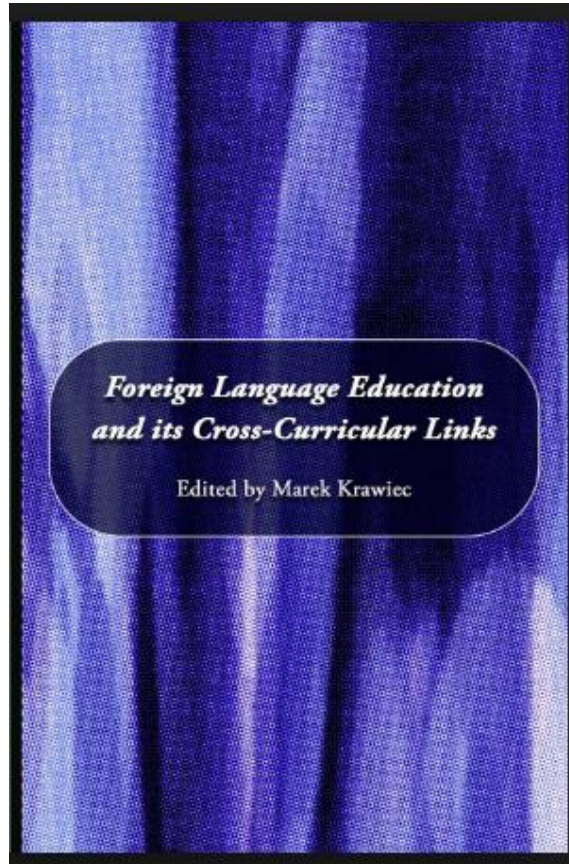
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Foreign Language Education and Its Cross-Curricular Links

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Introduction

Foreign language learning and teaching is such a multidimensional issue that it lets the researchers approach from a various number of perspectives. While some of the researchers focus on the issue from learners' point of view, some put a light on the effect of technology integration and some concentrate on the stakeholders' perceptions of different subjects. No matter what focal point they have, it is an irrefutable fact that while this continuous research enlightens the dark side of the foreign language learning, it also introduces new fields which require more and more systematic studies.

Under the spotlight of these studies, a great effort has been made to generate effective foreign language education. This present book *Foreign Language Education and Its Cross-Curricular Links*, edited by Marek Krawiec, makes a collection of several articles which have different points of views from different aspects in foreign language education. Thus, it helps the reader to have a general idea on foreign language learning environment and the connections it has among any other disciplines.

The book is presented in four parts, each of which includes three research articles by several writers. The articles in the first chapter of the book approach the field from different aspects, while the second chapter is a collection of those discussing ICT in foreign language education, the third chapter has a focal point of inter-cultural elements in foreign language education and the last one is about the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).

The content of the book has a wide range of topics. The common point of this selection is that these topics are reflecting some of the most emergent methods, theories and implications in the related research field. The findings of the included articles are significant in that they help the reader, teachers or learners, to mediate their methods and techniques in the light of this recent research.

Presentation

Part One, named *Various Aspects of Foreign Language Teaching and Learning*, introduces three research articles. The studies included in this part focus on teaching and learning a foreign language in terms of the Imperial Tetragon of Embodiment, of the authenticity issue in language classrooms and of the effect of self-assessment on learners' autonomy.

The first study, *English Language Teaching and Learning from the perspective the Imperial Tetragon of Embodiment* by Marlena Bielak, aims at analysing the English language teaching and learning process in Polish State high schools in terms of the Imperial Tetragon of Embodiment.

The second study, *Authenticity in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning: Controversies and Interpretations* by Magdalena Aleksandrzak, discusses the different points of view on the concept of authenticity from three fundamental perspective, which are the authenticity of the learning process, the authenticity of classroom communication and the authentic materials.

The last study has the title *the Importance of Building Learner Autonomy through Self-Assessment in ELT in Official Language Schools in Spain*. As the name of the article suggests the writer, Zofia Stasiakiewicz focuses on the important impact of self-assessment on raising the language learners', especially the adult ones', autonomy levels, which is an absolute must for the process of language accusation. *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages Learning, Teaching, and Assessment (CEFR)* is taken as the basic framework of the study, which is the main reference for the curriculum of the state schools in Spain.

Part two has the title of *ICT in Foreign Language Didactics*. The included articles narrow down the topic of ICT to specific web tools and their applications in language classrooms.

The initial study, named *On Forming Chosen Key Competences within The Visual Classrooms* by Martyna Klejnowska-Borowska, not only describes the web tools to create a virtual classroom but also discusses the benefits and the drawbacks of using such e-learning tools in language learning classrooms. The study provides a tool list to use in a virtual classroom accompanied with their functionalities.

Furthermore, the article examines the pros and cons of virtual classrooms in terms of the components of foreign languages, namely listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar and communication. The author suggests that virtual classroom tools are efficient for learners to improve their foreign language skills, presenting a table about which tool appeals to which skill.

The article goes on with another positive impact of virtual classrooms on learners: digital competence. The author argues that software used in virtual classrooms inevitably increases

the learners' competence in technology in that learners simply need to know how to use a computer and to criticize information gathered via the Internet they should learn how to distinguish between the valid and reliable information and be able to overcome the potential danger in online communication.

ICT Tools for Our Schools by Weronika Olek-Taszarek is the second article in part two. It is an overview of a selection of tools suggesting that questioning if the use of ICT in a language classroom is necessary or not is now an outdated debate. Therefore, the author presents a list of technological tools which are practical to use both for the beginners and the technologically-advanced users.

The grouping goes under nine titles. The presentation and video tools, photo tools, organising tools, file storage and collaboration tools, mind-mapping tools, audio tools, quiz and poll tools, web builders and lastly other tools. The author listed as many tools as she can providing online references for each. As a conclusion, she states that the number of these tools, the technological devices and free access to the Internet are not enough to effectively teach or learn a foreign language. An innovative teacher is the key element of integrating technology into foreign language learning environments.

The next and the final paper, called *Do It Yourself! Creative Language Learning with Self-made Web Comics* is written by Elena Schafer. The article discusses the Web comics as educative visuals which enlarge the creativity of language learners with their being simple, accessible and contemporary. Being an alternative to traditional classrooms, writing a story through web comics in a language classroom is also reported as an effective way of enhancing social skills of learners, such as collaboration, conflict management and interaction.

After introducing the characteristics of a comic the article goes on with the practical ways of how to integrate these into classrooms, making a distinction among pre, while and post activities. The author also suggests that in order for comics to be educative, they should be given in a context and be structured didactically.

Part three is presented under the title of *(Inter-) Cultural Components of Language Education*. It presents three articles which deal with foreign language education in terms of inter-culturality.

The first article, *Aspects of Intercultural Communication in LSP Teaching*, is written by Joanna Kic-Drgas. It discusses the reflections of interculturality on foreign language teaching. As a result of increasing mobility, the urgent need for learning new languages forces teachers to meet new challenges especially in LSP classes, where the learners need to learn how to respect and communicate with others from different cultures in a domain specific context. It is stated in the article that the implementation of cultural elements in LSP classes is even out of question because an individual who is sensitive to his/her own culture is more eager to communicate with other cultures

After defining a background for the topic, the author then introduces an intercultural game, the main aim of which is to highlight the cultural diversity and its consequences in communication. A case is given as a prompt for the learners and they are asked to discuss the situation in terms of the effect of the different cultures.

The next article, *Developing Intercultural Competence with Linguistic Landscape and M-Learning* is written by Jacek Tadeusz Walinski. The paper presents an empirical study on the implementation of linguistic landscape with m-learning. The term 'linguistic landscape' is described as a combination of any written piece of language on signs, billboards or street names. It is suggested that the diversity in the linguistic landscape is a sign for a diversity in culture. Thus, it should be made use of as an instrument in order to raise the learners' intercultural awareness.

The participants of the empirical study are asked to predict what languages will appear on signs in a previously defined linguistic landscape. Then they start to explore the area and take pictures of any sign in a different language with their mobile phones. Then, these locations are tagged on Google Maps. After collecting the data, the predictions and the actual results are compared to see if there is a difference in between. It is observed that some of the expected languages actually do not appear on the signs, either none or not as many as expected. The author infers from these results that some cultures are not recognised or neglected. As a conclusion, the author suggests that the way we integrate technology into language learning environments is more crucial than the technology itself.

The last article, the name of which is *Woman with Umbrella Then and Now: Painting, Soundtracks and Paparazzi in the German-as-a-Foreign-Language Classroom,* is written by Emilie Martinex. It deals with how to make use of paintings, soundtracks and paparazzi pictures in language classes as a reflection of culture within a task-based approach. It gives a design of a lesson in an art-integrated German-as-a-Foreign-Language course. It supports the idea that the learners' speaking and writing skills along with their socio cultural awareness progress with the help of art by motivating students to produce materials in target language.

Part 4, *CLIL in the Contemporary Language Class*, consists of three articles dealing with the CLIL integrated foreign language instruction. The articles approach CLIL from different aspects: game in CLIL, developing thinking skills and Storyline method.

The first article with a title of *Relevance of Bingo to Cross-curricular Language Learning and Teaching* renders the game as an effective technique in CLIL classrooms. The writer, Marek Krawiec, presents an empirical study on the role of Bingo game in EFL classes along with sample lessons plan implementing the game into CLIL.

The author finds out that all of the participants are in favour of playing Bingo game and they have positive perception of this game stating that it helps them learn vocabulary, pronunciation and many other thinking skills. Indicating that Bingo game is fun and brings cross-curricular content into language classrooms, the author attributes an important role to games especially Bingo in CLIL classrooms.

The next article, *English in Medicine: How CLIL Helps Develop Thinking Skills in Students* by Katarzyna Kurczak focuses on the medical English classes with low proficient language learners, identifying it as a niche in the literature. The results of the study indicate that students with a low level of proficiency have poorer HOTS (higher-order thinking skills) than those who are relatively better at English while reception of lower levels are higher than expected. The course is described as teaching low proficient learners how to deal with complex texts by developing thinking skills.

The final article, *The Cross-Curricular Nature of Storyline Method in Language Education,* is by Tomasz Rog. The author introduces the Storyline method in an interdisciplinary approach which allows teachers to help learners bring knowledge and skill from other disciplines. Presenting the principles of the method, the article goes on with a practical implementation of

Storyline in a CLIL classroom. As the method provides authentic language, it is suggested by the author in that it helps learners integrate their prior knowledge from different disciplines into their foreign language learning process.

Evaluation

Foreign Language Education and its Cross-Curricular Links opens new horizons for the readers by presenting a large variety of topics ranging from autonomy, ICT, CLIL to interculturality. The fact that this book does not concentrate on an only subject is an advantage for the reader to get information from different aspects and to explore the cross-curricular links of foreign language education. Although the title combines these articles under the title of cross curricular links, the variety of subjects shows itself as an appealing feature of the book.

The reader is provided with not only research articles but also review articles which put a light on many details of the topic. The first thing that attracts the reader's attention is the readability of the articles whether research or review. The messages and the key points are conveyed clearly by means of the neat outlines of the articles. The fact that the articles are dealing with different subjects does not hinder the reader from comprehending the texts.

As a conclusion, the book provides a useful collection of articles from various subtopics, thus forms a practical guide for those who are interested in the foreign language education. Especially the articles with sample lesson plans or effective ideas from ICT tools are of great help for those who are new to the field. It assists the reader to read further about his/her interest.