

Book Review / Recension d'ouvrage

Guofang Li and Patricia A. Edwards (2010). *Best Practices in ELL Instruction*. New York: The Guilford Press. 392 pages. ISBN: 978-60623-663-5 (hardcover), ISBN: 978-1-60623-662-8 (paperback)

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The book *Best Practices in ELL Instruction*, edited by Guofang Li and Patricia A. Edwards, is an informative and important book in which the authors weave together current research on teaching English Language Learners (ELL) with practical, research-based examples that can be taken directly from the book into the classroom. The importance and relevance of this book are outlined in the foreword, in which Lee Gunderson states that: "The number of [English Language Learning] students enrolled in North American schools has risen dramatically" (p. xvi). Gunderson further points out that while English language learners add "...incredible diversity to schools and school districts... it also finds teachers, through no fault of their own, unprepared to deal with the diversity, because ELL methodology, unfortunately, is not a feature of many teacher training programs" (p. xvi). This book provides teachers with a review of the current research literature on teaching students from diverse language backgrounds and is therefore a useful resource for classroom teachers.

Each chapter is written by a different contributing researcher or group of researchers; thus, the book contains an array of views from various aspects and areas of research. The chapters are divided into five main sections or parts: perspectives on ELL instruction; strategies for teaching young ELLs; Strategies for teaching adolescent ELLs; best practices in ELL/bilingual programs and approaches; and critical issues concerning ELL instruction. At the end each chapter, there is a section entitled *Engagement Activities* in which the reader is invited to reflect on what was read and learned in the chapter, and examples or suggestions as to how this new knowledge could be applied in the classroom. This is a useful section since it gives the reader the opportunity to pause in the reading and really become engaged in the information being presented.

One of the useful aspects of the book is the broad range of topics that are discussed in each chapter and the in-depth explanations and practical examples that accompany the research literature. In chapter three, for instance, contributing author Ellen McIntyre discusses teaching young English language learners in the mainstream classroom using a sociocultural approach. This chapter contains a comprehensive overview of the research surrounding language acquisition and strategies for teaching English language learners. It also contains sample excerpts from classroom conversations and samples of students' work that help solidify the research-based practices that are discussed. Since the ELL students I am working with this year are at the elementary level, I was able to take the research and examples from this chapter and use them with my own students. The strategies and exemplars discussed in this chapter could also be easily adapted and used with students at the intermediate and high school levels.

While a lot of the research and many of the strategies presented and discussed in this book could be adapted and used with students of all ages and levels of English proficiency, most of the research seemed to focus on students in elementary school. The book is a useful resource for teachers; however, I think it would be even more useful if a larger portion of the research had focused on intermediate or high school students. Though the book contains a section dedicated to teaching adolescent English language learners, the two chapters in that section seem to focus mainly on the research, without providing readers with concrete examples that would help tie the research to classroom practice.

Even though the two chapters do not contain concrete examples, the information presented in the chapters is still very beneficial to teachers because of the salient research regarding teaching ELL youth. In chapter six, for instance, contributing authors Harriett Allison and Linda Harklau address the issue of teaching academic literacy to students who are in high school classes, but who have limited English proficiency and who need instruction in basic literacy skills. One of the issues, as the authors point out, is that teachers at the intermediate and high school levels "...typically view themselves as content instructors, not teachers of reading" (p. 132). The authors also cite Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) when they point out that teaching reading at the high school level must go beyond basic instruction of decoding skills because the reading skills necessary at the high school level involve "...higher level skills, such as summarizing and identifying the key points, synthesizing across multiple sources, and reading critically" (p. 133). The challenges faced by both teachers and students are two-fold: teachers are not used to – or trained to – teach basic reading or literacy skills; and students may need instruction in basic decoding and literacy skills as well as higher-level reading skills. The research literature provided in this chapter, therefore, is very beneficial for teachers at the high school level who have English language learners in their classes.

Another aspect that makes this book a beneficial resource to teachers is that it contains topics that are not easily found in the existing research literature. One of those topics, for instance, is found in chapter 11 wherein the contributing authors – Alba A. Ortiz and Alfredo J. Artiles – discuss the educational needs of English language learners who have special learning challenges. According to these authors, as well as previous research done by Alfredo Artiles (see Klingner, Artiles & Barletta, 2006), research on ELL students who may also have learning challenges or disabilities is scarce. However, it seems to be an area in which research is being done (see Hamayan, Marler, Sanchez-Lopez & Damico, 2007). In their chapter, authors Ortiz and Artiles provide readers with salient research-based programs and services that could enrich the educational experiences of English Language Learners with exceptionalities.

This book provides readers with comprehensive research and practical examples that focus on teaching students at various ages who are learning English as an additional language. The book covers a wide range of topics and is written in an engaging, easy to follow format, allowing teachers to have the most up-to-date research at their fingertips. I would recommend this book as a useful resource for teachers who teach ELLs at all ages and grade levels.

Resources

- Hamayan, E., Marler, B., Sanchez-Lopez, C., & Damico, J. (2007). *Special education considerations for English language learners: delivering a continuum of services*. Philadelphia: Caslon Publishing.
- Klinger, J.K., Artiles, A. J., & Barlettea, L. M. (2006). English language learners who struggle with reading: language acquisition or LD? *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 29(2), 108-128.