

Reviews

Smith, David I. and Terry Osborn (eds.) *Spirituality, Social Justice and Language Learning*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2007, 184 pp.

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Osborn and Smith are hardly newcomers to the scholarship of language teaching and learning in a context of social justice and spirituality. This collection of eight essays serves to expand their already impressive book-length contributions on this and related topics. Themes from Smith and Carvill's *The Gift of the Stranger* and Osborn's *Teaching World Languages for Social Justice* come together in this volume for a fascinating, thought-provoking read that will inevitably lead teachers to reflect intensely on what they do and how they do it. Not only do these essays demand an even closer scrutiny of the enterprise, but they open the door to new considerations with some very practical implications for those who venture therein.

The selection of topics addressed in this volume is clearly designed to scaffold the spiritual underpinnings of the language teaching/learning enterprise, beginning with contextual considerations, followed by appropriate teacher education and classroom practices (parts I-III). In part IV, *Theoretical Perspectives*, Kristjansson's "The Word in the World: So to Speak (A Freirean Legacy)" and Smith's "Dialogue, Spirituality, and Voice: Verburg and Bakhtin on Speaking and Hearing" complete the volume with theoretical perspectives on the issues, a piece of the whole that well merits the pages devoted to it.

Essays in the opening section define the limitations of our current public world language curricula, and indicate areas that need to be addressed in both the public and private spheres. Osborn argues, “The challenge to critical researchers is to engage public discourse and scholarship in an effort [to] gain understanding of the interrelationships of spirituality, language learning and social justice” (p. 9). Smith, after a review of extant literature dealing with spiritual aspects of world-language education, summarizes the questions that remain to be answered. They are restated in a final section of the essay, entitled “Directions for Inquiry.” These directions, intended to incite further critical scholarship, include the study of the role of religious or spiritual beliefs in relationship to assumptions and approaches to language education, the construction and negotiation of relationships between cultures, the ways in which institutional frameworks influence language learning and teaching in the classroom, how interactions and discourse in language classrooms manifest or reinforce the beliefs and value systems of teachers and learners, and influences on behaviors and attitudes in the language classroom (pp. 23-24).

The bulk of the remaining essays in this section call attention to teacher education and to what teachers *do* in the classroom. On the whole, they suggest valuable approaches for language teaching grounded in spirituality and justice. The first, *Moral Agency, Spirituality, and the Language Classroom*, written by Smith, illustrates how educators actually “do” spirituality and justice in the language classroom. Besides the very concise and easily relatable examples, Smith makes a point that needs to be heard by all who would teach and those who prepare them: “If students articulate a moral intent behind their teaching, they should be able to point to aspects of their pedagogical design that reflect that intent, they should be seeking to identify aspects of their teaching that may undermine it, and they should be willing to reexamine both their teaching designs and their formulations of moral commitment as new insights may demand” (48). An essay by John Watzke focuses on historical and contemporary traditions in Catholic teacher education, long grounded in the belief that world language education must be viewed as a communal enterprise in which the communal aspect is “central to the process of becoming a teacher” (p. 67). The following section on classroom practice contains essays by Marilyn Bierling on the complexity of issues related to immigration, and David Smith, Sarah De Young, Ashley Uyaguari and Kathleen J. Avila on (auto)biographical narrative and its use in language teaching and learning.

It is the final part of the collection, “Theoretical Perspectives,” that, to this reviewer, more fully addresses the need for theoretical justification of the arguments presented in this and previous volumes, and the need to foster topics for future scholarly investigations. It is Carolyn Kristjánsson, in her essay on Freire’s thinking on critical pedagogy, who posits: “The question for language educators and language learners is how spiritual values might influence their stance, both intellectual and experiential, towards social, cultural, political, and ideological agendas where language is taught and learned” (p. 131). Smith, in the volume’s final essay, examines Verburg and Bakhtin, namely their “... preoccupation with finding room for individual voice and the responsible human person in linguistic theory” (p. 132). For Smith, “both theories draw some of their basic impulses from religious motifs, yielding approaches to language that have been in part shaped by spiritual concerns” (132).

As teachers and teacher trainers, we have been challenged multiple times by these editors in recent years to reconceptualize language teaching and learning as spiritual work, energized by a craving for justice. The reflective, yet practical, scholarship of colleagues presented in this tome accomplishes no less. The focus on practical implications and the theoretical foundations of said work are the book’s strength. Hopefully, these essays will lead to an even clearer understanding of the ways we teach language and the implications of these approaches for *all* learners, whether in the public or private sphere. “The professional literature on language learning is more likely to be supportive [...] if it abandons the assumption that the discourse of the language classroom can be adequately understood without reference to the spiritual commitments, convictions and values of both teacher and learner, as well as those of the theorists who are helping to construct their ideological environment” (Smith, p. 168). This addition to that body of literature does just that.