

Review of *Innovative practices in early English language education*, edited by David Valente and Daniel Xerri (2022). Palgrave Macmillan, 340pp., 137.14 (Hard Cover), EUR106.99 (eBook), ISBN 978-3-031-12921-6, ISBN 978-3-031-12922-3 (eBook).

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Compiled and edited by David Valente and Daniel Xerri, *Innovative Practices in Early English Language Education* is a timely collection of fifteen chapters by a diverse range of both esteemed and less well-known researchers and writers in the field of language education for early years (pre-primary) and primary (around 6-12 years old) children. This edited book welcomely fills a hole in the literature in a way which befits its title: the focus of each and every chapter is either highly innovative in itself or takes a fresh slant on a slightly more commonly found topic area. Back in 2014, Copland and Garton introduced a special edition of the *ELT Journal*, for which several of the same contributors wrote, by expressing the urgent need for research into more effective young language learner classroom pedagogies, including the principled use of technology, as well as the need for language teacher education and effective policy implementation. Published just eight years later, this collection of chapters from Palgrave Macmillan shines a unique 2020s spotlight on thinking in relation to aspects of teaching, learning and teacher education currently under debate in the wider TEYL (Teaching English to Young Learners) world, which have greatly moved on from those identified in 2014. As the aptly titled introduction explains, this is a(nother) true 'call to action', aimed at bringing currently critical issues in TEYL to the table once again.

The volume is in two main parts: the first focusses on early years and primary teaching and learning, be that in a mainstream or out-of-school setting, incorporating key areas such as curriculum, competencies and literacies, and assessment. Meanwhile, the second part considers issues and themes in young learner teacher education. The book would seem best suited, therefore, to more experienced teachers of young learners (early years and primary), teacher educators (pre- and in-service), researchers, academics and others involved in TEYL design, as well as those undertaking post degree level training programmes and other formal in-service training or development. It may, on the other hand, be less appropriate for pre-service teachers, especially early on in their training, as it tends to extend rather than introduce concepts in particular areas.

Each chapter is structured in a uniform way, which emphasises the link rather than divide between theory, research and practice: after an initial introduction to the topic, definition and discussion of terms and key concepts are included, followed by analysis of current literature or research. The second part of each chapter offers the reader a practical take-away, ranging from a set of principles for classroom practice or educational design, to suggested frameworks, activities or examples from the writer's research context. This consistency between chapters is refreshing in such a book, and keeps the reader focused on the relevance of the chapters' topics to their own teaching or training practice; it also ensures that the chapters are accessible to different readers and will offer

theory and practice, and hence theorised practice, as well as extensive further reading suggestions and an insight into the connectedness of the different topics.

Valente and Xerri explain in their introduction how Makalela's (2016) concept of *ubuntu*, which 'foregrounds confluence and interconnectedness by recognising the necessity of engaging with others to thrive' (p.1), underlies the organisation and the very ethos of this book. Indeed, the notion of teachers, teacher educators, policy makers and other key players in learners' lives working with and for these children in their development and learning within the rapidly changing post-pandemic world runs as a clear theme throughout the chapters, which are tied together in such a way as to build the reader's awareness and understanding of key issues and concerns across the volume. While it can be usefully dipped into for reading on individual topics, it was also an immensely valuable cover-to-cover read. Chapters are connected through interlinking themes, both within and across the two parts of the book, the first of which focuses on young learner practices (early years and primary), the second on teacher education.

The first grouping of chapters can be seen as those with a higher-level focus, for example on curriculum and approach. Recognising the varied curriculum contexts in which TEYL occurs around the world, Littlejohn, in Chapter 2, reminds us of the need to reach out to the education field as a whole to support the development of young learner language education, and provides eight principles for course design from a social constructivist viewpoint with clear supporting examples to help us redefine our starting point for ELT in mainstream primary education. Curriculum also comes into focus in Lagerwaard's chapter (Chapter 3), where he discusses the term 'agency' and considers pedagogical principles for supporting upper primary children's agency through innovative approaches. Meanwhile, Waddington (Chapter 11) provides the reader with a window into her pre-service training programme which integrates ELT into other methodology courses, modelling a whole-child approach through a whole-teacher one in training, one where attention is paid to interrelating attitude, knowledge, and practice (Chen & McCray, 2012).

The subsequent chapters shift the focus more towards the classroom, with a specific look at competencies and skills more scarcely found in existing literature: In Chapter 4, for example, Read crafts a model for integrating intercultural competence into pre-school and primary language curricula, and identifies six key issues that such a model needs to address. Shi (Chapter 5) then draws on her research with early years learners as she discusses strong and weak forms of translanguaging as part of a multilingual pedagogy, contributing to Vogel and García's (2017) call to embrace all languages in children's repertoires. In relation to this, Ibrahim (Chapter 12) looks at monolingual bias in pre-service teacher education and offers various practical suggestions for engaging trainees on a personal as well as a pedagogical level through awareness-raising activities which will, in turn, influence their classroom practice, as we saw in Waddington's chapter. Valente's own chapter (Chapter 13) adjusts the direction as he illustrates ways in which we can encourage student teachers to question stereotypes and assumptions as well as to embrace 'difficult' topics through picturebooks. He provides a clear 4-stage example for primary practice where children are led to question and explore issues they are exposed to in picturebook stories, and notes how modelling behaviours, thinking and practice is important in teacher education.

Visual and digital literacy skills development are the focus of Shin's and Neokleus' contributions (Chapters 6 and 7, respectively), both highly topical in the modern, multimodal world, yet under-researched, especially in the TEYL field. Shin proposes Serafini's (2014) three-stage model to support visual literacy development in the classroom, while Neokleus reminds the reader of UNESCO's (2014) renewed definition of literacy, which is finding its way into various curricula for schools. He goes on to highlight the need for raising teacher awareness and developing their related skills and knowledge in order to implement his nine-Cs framework for classroom practice. In Chapter 8, Ellis and Gruenbaum continue the multimodal theme: They present five benchmarks for selecting read-alouds, drawing on their research, and continue with a five-step framework for sequencing activities, reminding the reader of the highly valuable and innovative PEPELT (2021) e-lessons available online. These chapters on literacies create a bridge with other chapters, such as Valente's, by looking at the contribution

picturebook read-alouds can make to children's language skills and intercultural literacy, defined by Heyward (2002, in Savić, 2013, p.37) as involving 'the understanding, competence, attitudes, language proficiency, participation, and identities necessary for successful living and working in a cross-cultural setting'.

The final two chapters in Part 1, penned by Rixon (Chapter 9) and Butler (Chapter 10) turn to assessment. Rixon provides valuable reminders of key aspects of assessment for learning, which, she observes, remains less widespread than we might realise in Primary ELT around the world. She looks at the historical perspective and has the reader reflect on some of the causes of this lack of uptake of assessment for learning (AFL) practices in ELT before presenting and discussing five key strategies. Towards the end of the chapter, she reminds us of the need for professional development to address challenges in this area. Subsequently, Butler spotlights self-assessment, and similarly considers some of the issues and constraints to its implementation in primary ELT classrooms. The practical section of this chapter comprises a valuable set of pedagogical principles for implementing self-assessment as a learning tool for primary learners.

Moving back to the training context, in Chapter 14, Lim, Renandya and Kaur focus on metacognitive practices in teacher education, considering how metacognition supports language learning and teacher learning as a precondition to supporting learner metacognition. The authors cite the Singapore primary English Language Syllabus, which emphasises metacognition, and further illustrate the need for teacher education programmes to work in tandem with this newly implemented syllabus, showing how this may be achieved using a two-pronged approach to programme design. Again in this chapter, the reader notes the push in teacher education for modelling and mirroring principles, practices, attitudes and behaviours which are beneficial to the young learner language classroom and, of course, the development of the whole child. Lastly, in Chapter 15, Myrset and McConachy highlight the importance of incorporating pragmatics into language teacher education, bringing the reader full circle back through the multilingual, multicultural perspective, to return to curriculum and approach. In this final chapter, the authors again note that pragmatics tends to be under-represented in teacher education programmes and that related research is scarce. They propose a set of principles to inform primary language teacher education and present an example to illustrate a task-based approach to developing pedagogic knowledge in such contexts.

In summary, as can be seen from this overview of its 15 chapters, this volume is indeed highly innovative: its logical structure holds the reader's hand and guides them through a range of topics and issues which are not only under-researched but are becoming more and more crucial in today's increasingly complex world. The call to develop and model practices in teacher education to support the teachers of tomorrow in different contexts is invaluable. Indeed, this book comes highly recommended as reading for teacher educators, as well as higher degree level teachers and those involved in developing teacher education programmes. While the balance tips in favour of primary over early years contexts, and pre-service over in-service training contexts, the chapters remain highly valuable to those working with early years children and their teachers. As an educator of both primary and early years teachers, largely in-service but also pre-service, I would highly recommend this book to all others in the field of young learners and of teacher education. As critical, emerging themes in language teaching, as well as in education more generally - far from being simple trends or passing fashions - the topics covered in the chapters are either original in themselves or take an innovative slant on more commonly discussed issues. As such, it is a refreshing, thought-provoking, probably inspiring read for all kinds of practitioner, and certainly serves to advance the field of early language education.

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Disclosure statement

I declare that there is no potential conflict of interest.

About the author

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