



Social Research Applied to English Language Teaching in Colombian Contexts: Theory and Methods.

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For decades, many researchers and teachers in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) have acknowledged the challenges of bridging the gap between research and practice (Belcher, 2007; Korthagen, 2007). These are challenges for both teachers (e.g., technical language used in research) and researchers (e.g., lack of pedagogical implications for teachers). Wilder Escobar, editor of the book *Social Research Applied to English Language Teaching in Colombian Contexts: Theory and Methods*, attempts to address these challenges and invites authors to offer readers practical applications in ELT. With an introduction by the editor, followed by five chapters from different authors, this book explores various research subthemes centered on putting theory into practice. Each author demonstrates how his/her research project strives for implications from practice into what the editor has called social research. Each chapter envisions how the classroom, teaching practices, and social relations may influence language learning, a premise that is well supported by each author's systematic inquiry. I have reviewed this book with the following question in mind: How can researchers and teachers understand the connection of both worlds and use this knowledge for significant changes in the classroom?

Escobar introduces the book by examining concepts related to language learning as a social

practice. He argues that teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) has been somehow associated with procedures that seem to be mechanical. In particular, Escobar disputes that EFL is a standard practice that is homogeneously exercised in the classroom. Furthermore, he explains that there are two general misconceptions about knowledge. First, he challenges the notion that knowledge is perceived as static rather than dynamic. Second, he defies that knowledge and its components often exist in isolation and argues that it, in fact, is an interrelated ecosystem of functional elements. Thus, Escobar rightly proposes that knowledge should be seen as a dynamic process that is (re) conceptualized by individuals in a social context. By stressing the importance of the social context in ELT, particularly in Colombia, Escobar sets the stage for the upcoming chapters.

In chapter 1, *The Linguistic Typology of Verb Structure: A Comparative Approach for the EFL Classroom*, Evans explores the notion that EFL teachers in Spanish-speaking countries such as Colombia may struggle with certain features of colloquial speech such as phrasal verbs. This mainly occurs because both languages have different linguistic structures. Evans envisions that these challenges can be overcome by accomplishing two main goals for the English phrasal verb construction enigma: 1) to elucidate the typological differences

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between Spanish and English verb construction in phrasal verbs, and 2) to provide strategies for phrasal verb instruction that can be used in the EFL classroom. Evans argues that many educators are unfamiliar with the linguistic typology paradigm and, therefore, often disregard any direct instruction in the syntactic construction of phrasal verbs. He suggests that direct instruction of linguistic typology can be helpful for English learners whose L1 typology differs from English.

In chapter 2, *Social Dynamics Shaping English Learning Processes*, the authors report the results of an ethnographic case study that explores potential negative effects that unbalanced social dynamics have on the relationships among students with and without disabilities. In this chapter, they first present relevant literature in order to explore the conceptions of inclusive education in the Colombian context. Then, they argue that the main purpose of their study is to analyze two perspectives: the interpretation of a social situation and the meaning of the situation through real experiences. In order to accomplish this goal, they use various research data collection instruments such as documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, and physical artifacts. Upon data analysis, they uncovered three major categories: exclusion, rejection, and interaction. These three social dynamics seem to produce inequality between mainstream students and those with special needs. Although there was an inclusion policy in the school where data was collected, there was a belief that students with special needs have diminished learning and social capacities. The authors conclude by recognizing the importance of rethinking the current curriculum and by making special adjustments in order to close the achievement gap within English classrooms with special needs students.

Chapter 3, *Effects of Emotional Barriers and Disempowerment on Learning and Communicative Processes Present in EFL Students*, delves into the concept of emotions playing a fundamental role in the learning process as it is directly related to the cognitive self. Pérez draws from Krashen's *Affective Filter Hypothesis* and concepts of emotional intelligence as a point

of departure for his study. Classroom observations and semi-structured interviews were employed with a group considered "socially difficult" in order to identify emotional barriers regarding foreign-language learning. The author's main goal was to use the data collected to design an approach to foreign-language learning that considers emotional factors and their effect in student learning. One of the salient emerging categories from this study is the theme of social and group pressure. Participants reported manifestations of academic pressure from their parents because of demands of high levels of excellence. Pérez concludes that this creates emotional barriers that produce obstacles in learning and suggests that these obstacles can be overcome through an emotional empowerment approach whereby students acquire skills that make them feel able to develop self-efficacy and control over their emotions.

In chapter 4, Montenegro, Torres, and Molina explore literacy practices in the Colombian EFL context. Using Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) as an approach, the authors explore students' notions of culture while teaching science in an English class. They set the stage by describing the advantages and benefits a CLIL approach has on learner' performance and move on to describe how teachers acknowledge and value their students' sociocultural backgrounds when designing instruction for the science class. The results suggest that although students face many personal challenges in their lives, they perceived the classroom as a positive hub for academic success, contributing to active class participation. The combination of a CLIL approach and contextualized lessons based on students' realities can be quite effective; yet, CLIL professional development is needed. Finally, the authors suggest that there is an urgent need for teachers to recognize that Colombian students' realities cannot be neglected so that learning can be maximized.

In chapter 5, Quevedo explores how children expand their awareness concerning social issues through narratives of their own experiences. Borrowing from Freire's (1973) critical pedagogy and conscientization, Quevedo encourages fifth

graders to produce stories to explore their social views. Through narratives, students made sense of their realities which were related to critical aspects of their lives such as death, accidents, and family dynamics, among others. Quevedo assures that these stories are rewarding, self-assuring, and engaging for children. She suggests that teachers can adopt a new view of writing for social practice with a critical stance. She concludes with pointers for future research suggesting explorations into the concepts of funds of knowledge and the role of parents and emotions in children's narratives. These could serve as a springboard for social changes in ELT education.

As stated at the outset of this review, there is a gap between research and practice in ELT, and this book effectively addresses this issue. All the authors of the chapters are EFL educators who have conducted research particularly within the Colombian context and they are somehow connected with Universidad El Bosque's undergraduate program in bilingual education either as professors, research collaborators, or former and current students of the same program. These connections are crucial to bridge the gap between research and practice in ELT.

This book is an important contribution because it includes how theory is practiced, mainly showing results of research conducted in classrooms. It also provides readers with a good opportunity to learn ELT practices from teachers rather than researchers only. Readers who are practitioners, and even researchers, will likely find this book inspiring because knowledge is being mobilized by teachers. This might also encourage teachers

who wish to publish their classroom practices or research projects in edited books or other types of publications.

Great pedagogical *knowledges* for practice are depicted in this book: 1) how an understanding of how phrasal verbs formed in English can benefit learning, 2) how social dynamics (exclusion, rejection, and interaction) produce inequality between the mainstream students and children with special needs, 3) how students' socio-cultural background and emotions are necessary for successful language attainment, 4) how a CLIL approach motivated and engaged students in a Science class, and 5) how critical pedagogy can inform children's narratives.

This book is highly recommended for readers interested in social research in ELT. The topics discussed in this book should be of great interest to those working in the field of ELT, particularly in Colombia, and researchers who seek to bridge the gap between theory and practice. The result of this book is a work of proficiency and severe insights into inquiry of diverse topics that benefit both the research and ELT teaching communities.

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