

BOOK REVIEWS

Teaching is Interaction! (Analyzing de-facto-didactics)

Unterricht ist Interaktion! [Anthology] / R. Schmitt (ed.). – Mannheim: Amades Publ., 2011. (Working Papers and Materials in German Language; vol. 41) 240 p. ISBN 978-3-937241-33-3¹

The book “Unterricht ist Interaktion!” (Teaching is interaction!), published by the Amades Publishing Office of the Institute of the German language (Mannheim, Germany), is the result of the collaborative efforts of researchers, teachers and methodologists involved in a research project which deals with teaching as multimodal interaction at gymnasiums and other schools in Germany.

The collective monograph consists of three parts: the Introduction covering theoretical and methodological bases of teaching as interaction; the empirical analyses of videotaped English, Mathematics and Chemistry lessons; dictation lesson at a Rudolf Steiner School and lesson stages reconstruction; the synopsis with the summary resume: (a) the feasibility and usefulness of the concept; (b) the possibility of bringing *de facto-didactics* in a separate science based on empirical data.

The communication-centered approach to teaching is based on the ethnography and methodological principle of researching social environment, and, thus, it is situation-related. In this case, interaction is the result of all participants' actions in constructing social reality. This fundamental idea proposed by H. Garfinkel (1967) was applied by the authors to teaching. They have conceptualized the lesson as a sociological snapshot which can be analyzed as the process of interaction and the activity of the participants as well. But treating a lesson only as interaction created a risk not to reveal *de facto-didactics*. It implies an organized interaction process, aimed at the successful teaching through which students acquire the knowledge, skills, experience and develop personal qualities and competences. Nevertheless, the authors managed to avoid unilateralism in this approach. They reveal that reconstruction of a teacher's and students' in-classroom activity helps to identify the actual didactic principals which are essential for teaching.

Considering teaching as a social classroom interaction, the authors point out the following conceptual phases of the lesson: “student's classroom work/ student's independent classroom work” → “student as an interactive specialist” → “lesson as interaction and communication” ← “teacher as an interactive specialist” ← “teacher's classroom work/ teacher's independent classroom work. The teaching process and its dynamism depend on the teacher's role in a classroom. When the teacher and students interact, the students accept the teacher as a “focus person”.

The underlying principle of lesson study as interaction is the concept of multimodality. According to it, the space of the classroom is organized in a multimodal way and serves as a resource for interaction; therefore, multifocal orientation on spatial reconstructions as well as mechanisms ensuring communication is a fundamental component of research.

The monograph consists of works which cover the analysis of various classroom spaces:

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- (1) discussion of vital (brisant) issues, for example, on “national identity” in an English class (T. Kindermann; P. Kühner; R. Schmitt);
- (2) experiment in a Chemistry class: carrying out and its planning (E.-M. Putzier)
- (3) teaching mathematical tasks (S. Jörissen);
- (4) experience regarding the perspective divergence between a teacher and a student (U. Reitemeier);
- (5) interactive dictation in a Chemistry class at a Rudolf Steiner School (D. Heidtmann, R. Schmitt);

These works also contain theoretical conclusions on methodology and didactics (R. Schmitt).

The concept of multimodal resource includes the awareness of social environment for any communication. In this case, in our view, it would be a good idea to investigate communicative and pragmatic balance of communicative and non-communicative actions, as well body language, when the speech is “interwoven” (verflochten) in the non-communicative behavior of the participants. In this respect the analysis of the interactive dictation in a Chemistry class at a Rudolf Steiner School serves as a good example. The specific feature of this and similar lessons is that students do not have textbooks. This brings students to “creating their own textbooks” (Epochenhefte) through recoding the communicative and non-communicative behavior of a teacher in specialized notebooks during the academic year. In the process of dictation knowledge transmission takes place together with the process of codification (book creating process); so, the stages of social interaction coincide. The mosaic of a teacher’s behavior is shaped by the following methods: boundary marking by means of pause-segmentation, processual marking with the help of such relevant means as verbal communication, gestures, object manipulation; projected and retrospective verbal clarification. The structure of such knowledge transmission aims at multicognitive encouragement of learning. Under this approach, various cognitive criteria are not only divided in a didactically motivated way but they also change each other dynamically. The authors fairly point out the risks of cognitive overload of the students and disorientation of the lesson theme as a result of long dictation.

The value of the monograph is *de facto-didactics* which is described by a two-component unit. It characterizes various aspects of the teaching process and reveals a specifically professional teacher’s behavior as a didactic permanent process in every stage of the lesson. In this respect, there are no didactic-neutral and non-didactic aspects of the teacher’s behavior. On the one hand, *de facto-didactics* presents teacher-student actions only as interaction; on the other hand, it refers to structural distinction of theoretical and methodological resources which being independent of interaction, describe the teacher’s reaction to the developing interactive situation.

According to the authors, *de facto-didactics* is not an evaluation concept; but it is a structural analytic concept which reflects the interactive classroom environment. It takes into account the didactic behavior of a teacher without assessing it. At the same time the two forms of professional activity *de facto-didactics* and *didactics* are interconnected and change each other; the positive impact is possible, provided that *de facto-didactics* depends on the interactive behavior of a teacher, who is conscious of it. So, the teacher is able to react to the classroom situation in an interactive and structural way. *De facto-didactics* is not an argument against lesson planning process, but through videotaped lessons it becomes clear that concentration on limited time and a well-organized plan does not ensure the teacher’s sensibility and the effectiveness of teaching is reduced.

To sum up, it should be noted, the collective monograph presents an interesting and completely new approach not only to aspects of interaction and its

types but it also differs aspects of didactics; the latter in the form of *de facto-didactics* presents a separate interactive resource, in-classroom space, and that is interaction.

Owing to the actuality and novelty of dealing with multimodality interaction, the book under review opens new possibilities for studies of this kind, reflecting interdisciplinary integration. It offers a fresh look at a lesson in terms of social implications and provides great interest to a wide variety of specialists.

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Cultural Aspects in Teaching English at Primary Schools

Reid, Eva (2014). *Cultural Aspects in Teaching English at Primary Schools*. Frankfurt Am Main Peter Lang. ISBN 978-3-631-65553-5.

With the advent of nearly universal English-language instruction for primary students across Europe, Dr. Reid's monograph is very timely, and frames the educational and cultural issues at stake in a rigorous, innovative fashion. Surprisingly little scientific research has to date accompanied the economic and political pressure to teach everyone to speak English, and this study contributes significantly to correcting this lack. Reid starts from the recommendations of the Common European Framework of Reference for Language Learning, Teaching, and Assessment (2002) with respect to the need to foreground cultural aspects of language if students hope to reach the goal of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). While Reid focuses on the situation in Slovakia, and its particular challenges, her method and findings are highly relevant to the study of English-language – or any foreign-language – instruction across Europe, and internationally. Her primary finding is that school curricula don't adequately reflect the goals of ICC, and that teachers give little attention to the cultural dimensions of language, even when they say and believe that it is a priority. The study is especially commendable with respect to: the breadth and depth of the literature review on the place of language in culture, and culture in language teaching; the use of a tripartite qualitative methodology that includes document analysis, classroom observations, and semi-structure interviews with teachers; the careful synthesis of the results of her three modes of inquiry; and the reflections on the relation between primary teacher's problems realizing ICC.

Reid provides a thorough, but still concise, review of contemporary thinking about the connections between language pedagogy, aspects of intercultural and multicultural pedagogy, and models of intercultural communicative competence. This by itself would be worth the price of the monograph, and I have already passed it on in draft to some of my students. Most interesting is her development in this context of the value of the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) model, which offers practical, theoretically grounded, methods of achieving higher levels of communicative competence that are possible with traditional instruction. Where the teachers that Reid observes fall short in their English instruction is often precisely where the traditional preference for 'mastery' of decontextualized rules and vocabulary takes precedence over the creation of language and content-rich learning contexts. Reid's choice of qualitative methodologies, including participant-observation, to explore these phenomena is very appropriate. She combines analysis of curricular materials with observations of the purported implementation of these curricula by teachers, along with interviews with the teachers. Through the triangulation of the analyses of these three sets of data, Reid is able to illuminate the problematic relationships that exist between teachers, teacher knowledge, curricula, and student learning. This mode of inquiry also allows her to reflect more usefully on the role of teacher education in preparing language teachers to actually understand the goal of language teaching – communicative competence in intercultural contexts – and means by which they might help their students realize this goal. One wonders whether many teachers of English, given the ways in which they themselves learned the language, have achieved sufficient intercultural communicative competence in English themselves.

The most likely audience for this book will be university teacher education students and faculty: though this is not itself a 'how-to' book of language pedagogy, it would serve very well as the necessary foundation for understanding what one is supposed to be doing when he or she teaches someone a foreign language. It also has

a potential readership among scholars of language education generally, since it opens up several conceptual questions in a field that has heretofore been dominated more by policy papers than careful research. In the European context, where qualitative methodologies are less well known and less utilized than in North America, this monograph also has tremendous potential. Most of the core problems of educational practice, which we now understand always takes place in complex cultural contexts, are better approached – at least initially – from a qualitative standpoint. It's important to see clearly what and who is in front of you before you start counting frequencies or passing out surveys. One might even conceive of a more qualitative approach to understanding as an expression of intercultural communicative competence.

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