

The tapestry of language learning: The individual in the communicative classroom.

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The Tapestry of Language Learning Communicative Classroom

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The Tapestry of Language Learning: The Individual in the Comm

Robin C. Scarcella and Rebecca L. Oxford (1992)

Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle Publishers

Pp. 228. ISBN 0-8384-2359-0 (paper)

US \$18.00

The Tapestry of Language Learning is the cornerstone of a new series from Heinle and Heir task-based learning with a concern for students' individual differences' (p. v). The text sets teaching and language learning in a classroom setting. Although the tapestry metaphor is overview of the communicative approach to ESL instruction as it is often practiced in the U

The text is divided into three parts. Part I provides an overview of the Tapestry approach. I second language acquisition theories and learner characteristics. Part III deals with langua

The Tapestry of Language Learning does not focus on language acquisition theory or resear particularly in the adult academic or pre-academic ESL classroom. As an overview, it succ

that concern active ESL teachers. The authors present a consistent viewpoint throughout, Development (Vygotsky, 1978) and Canale and Swain's (1980) discussion of communicative competence advocate integrative skills classes and content-based instruction (although the last half of the book is devoted to content-based instruction). Each chapter contains pre-reading questions and post-reading activities that provide useful scaffolding. My teacher trainees responded especially well to the section on teacher roles.

The text, however, has more breadth than depth. Chapters and sections alike are short. Most chapters are giving the reader a rushed, breathless feeling. In spite of the authors' impressive research results that led them to develop this approach. The skills chapters are particularly thin, with little on learning styles and strategies, which were covered so admirably in Oxford (1990), only brief mentions of development particularly frustrating. The descriptions of competing theories are not thorough, and the understanding of the concepts involved.

[-1-]

I used the text last year for an undergraduate teacher training class. Most of the students were experienced teachers. While the pre-reading questions stimulated many thoughtful journal entries, the post-reading questions were too easy to assume a basis of teaching experience that my students lacked. I also felt the students were bored by some chapters. Most of my students were planning to work with children in bilingual situations, and their concerns. The book also shows a strong US-Canada bias; teachers who must deal with the needs of students from other countries will find little help in adapting the Tapestry approach to their situations.

While I admit to having a bias against 'name brand methods,' the Tapestry Approach is so good that its emphasis on interaction can never be strong enough when it is so easy for teachers to fall back on more traditional methods. I stress that communicative competence includes grammatical competence, to the extent of what is necessary for communication (not other linguistic sub-skills). The textbooks that Heinle & Heinle has published under the name of the Tapestry series are the books that won universally positive reviews from my teacher trainees. If this is any indication of the quality of the books, they are excellent.

However, as a teacher trainer, I wished for more heft in the weave. I would like to see more emphasis on the application. A text that advocates a comprehensive approach to language teaching should also address the challenges of implementation. New teachers are the most open to new ideas, but the least able to put them into practice when they were language students themselves. They can't always imagine innovative ways to overcome the obstacles they don't understand the political or administrative reasons for segregated skills courses (p. 9). In-service training, after teachers have some real-world experience to inform their discussions, is essential. I also wish that administrators who evaluate language teachers, but who are not specialists in language teaching, were better informed.

I welcome the Tapestry series to the arsenal of ESL teaching materials, and *The Tapestry of Communication* to ESL teacher training. No text can be all things to every audience, and Scarcella and Oxford's vision of a language classroom that is communicative, productive, and caring. [-2-]

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