

Reviews

Osborn, Terry *Teaching World Languages for Social Justice: A Sourcebook of Principles and Practices*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006, 200 pp. ISBN 0-8058-5075-9, \$24.50

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With English becoming increasingly important as a lingua franca worldwide, attempts to justify the study of other world languages hinge principally on utilitarian and economic concerns. What languages have to do with everyday life, or their ability to increase an individual's marketability tend to be important areas of consideration in a youthful culture reluctant to undertake the study of anything deemed irrelevant. In his most recent book, Terry Osborn calls for a reconsideration of the philosophical underpinnings of our current system of world language pedagogy and curricula, as well as the way these are implemented. In an earlier work, *The Foreign Language Educator in Society: Toward a Critical Pedagogy* (2002), Osborn and coauthor Timothy Reagan addressed an array of contemporary social issues related to the learning and teaching of second languages in the United States. In *Teaching World Languages for Social Justice*, Osborn goes beyond simple identification of issues to a paradigm for incorporating them into the heart of a constructivist pedagogy, a combination that has promise in rejuvenating waning interest in learning world languages.

The first four chapters of Osborn's book make the case for modern curricula that address the issues most pertinent to students and teachers of language as well as to the communities in which they live, teach, and learn. His call is for language "curricula and instruction along the lines of a critical approach to language education, pedagogically oriented toward an exploration of issues related to the role of language in discourses, in discrimination and in ideology." (9) These chapters challenge the most frequent justi-

fications given for foreign language study, including those related to the marketplace, such as finding suitable employment and conversational language needed for tourism. The focus, he implores, should be turned rather toward a study of the “other,” and of the other’s place in our communities, and—in the end—the other’s place our lives. This humanization of the enterprise makes this book essential reading for world language majors, minors, and teachers at every level.

The remaining chapters are very practical in nature. This is evidenced in the chapter “The Politics of Grammar and Vocabulary,” in which the author calls for the examination of the lives of real people as the catalyst to “a powerful exploration that incorporates language learning and social justice to drive vocabulary themes and grammar choices.” (65) Credentialing of new teachers, selection of topics taught, continued inclusion of literary studies, interdisciplinary possibilities, “communities in cyberspace,” analyses of media portrayals of said communities, and job descriptions and announcements are among the other topics addressed in this volume. Replete with very practical suggestions for instituting and maintaining these radical curricular ideas, Osborn’s work gives ample evidence of their possibilities while leaving creative place for exploration by students and teachers in a world of *different* communities where social justice is desirable and doable.

In a period when those at the helm of our government are calling for our youth to study less-commonly taught languages, especially those pertinent to our life of security concerns and related geopolitical situations, one can appreciate Osborn’s poignant call for languages not only as the means to understanding but also as a conduit of justice, first in our local communities, with an eye to ever broadening horizons. These are the things we educators should be talking about and doing. These are the issues that Christian universities especially should be addressing as they review programs and plan for the future. If justice is to “flow like a river,” it must begin in those places within our educational institutions where the topics of intercultural harmony and understanding are placed at the fore. Not only should all Christian language students and educators read Osborn’s work, but they should begin the incremental implementation of its ideas, per his stated vision: “First, a few teachers try. Then, others learn from those who succeed. Third we transform our professional world. All along, we change our social world.” (163)