

CURRENT RESEARCH INTO YOUNG FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS' LITERACY SKILLS

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Titulaire d'un doctorat en Linguistique, Verónica Sánchez Abchi est chercheuse à l'IRDP (Neuchâtel, Suisse), où elle travaille sur des projets concernant la di-dactique et l'évaluation des langues. Elle est également chargée d'enseignement (Didactique de l'espagnol) à l'Université de Genève.

This book presents a selection of articles that address a relatively little explored area of foreign language instruction: the teaching and assessment of literacy skills in a foreign language at an early age - when children are still acquiring the foundations of literacy in the language of schooling. The theoretical contributions presented in the book are particularly relevant to debates around foreign language education policies.

The book, coordinated by Stephanie Frisch and Jutta Rymarczyk, gathers contributions that are structured in two main sections: a) the assessment of foreign language literacy skills and b) suggestions that support the process of learning these skills.

The first section is composed of five contributions. Rymarczyk's chapter, *Teachers' diagnostic skills in feedback on German primary school students' first attempts to spell in English*, presents a study of teachers' practices and conceptions in assessing writing in a foreign language - English in this case. The perspective mainly concerns foreign language teacher training, but some reflections that emerge from the analysis, such as the importance of

emphasizing achievement rather than error, can also be transferred to assessment in the local language.

The chapter by Frisch et al., *Developing and assessing reading comprehension in primary learners in English as a foreign language* details the process of creating an EFL comprehension tests at the primary level. The chapter, which starts with the analysis of existing tests and the presentation of a model to define constructs, also provides initial results of their pilot study. The chapter is not only clear and informative from a research perspective but can also be extremely useful in the training of foreign language teachers.

The chapter by Karges, Barras and Lenz, *Assessing young language learners' receptive skills: should we ask the questions in the language of schooling?* analyzes whether it is better to use the local language or the target language in comprehension questions created for texts presented in the target language and the impact this choice has on the assessment construct. With great thoroughness and by combining different methodologies, the authors reach conclusions of crucial importance in foreign language assessment.

Trüb and Keller, in the chapter *Conceptualising and measuring writing in English as a Foreign Language at primary school*, address a difficult issue. If the assessment of writing in the local languages already raises many questions, then in the target language and especially at the beginning of the literacy process, the assessment of this is even more difficult. The authors take up this challenge and present suggestions and concrete examples including rating scales for assessing written production in foreign languages.

The first section closes with a chapter by Mourão et al. *Battling against a traditional assessment culture: The case of early English learning in Portugal*. The chapter presents a study of teachers' perceptions of English assessment at the primary level. This chapter, which also offers an overview of EFL teaching in Portugal, provides observations primarily for classroom assessment.

The second section of the book, *Fostering reading, spelling, and writing*, comprises four chapters that adopt a practical perspective. Macrory, in the chapter *'Commas in the air': Young children's experiences of learning the orthographies of French and Spanish as a foreign language*, explores children's attitudes and experiences with orthographic systems of other languages. The author presents the case of English-speaking children who discover the characteristics of French and Spanish orthography in the context through spelling activities. The author presents, based on the qualitative analysis of interviews, not only the children's perceptions but also the teachers' perspective about this issue. The analysis offers clues that can contribute to the design of spelling activities for young learners.

Kolb in *Story Apps - new ways in teaching reading in primary EFL?* describes the advantages of using the *Story Apps* tool to support the learning process of children who are beginning to study a foreign language. According to the results presented, the use of *Story Apps* to support foreign language comprehension not only constitutes an important motivational factor, but also supports the development of specific reading strategies.

Reckermann and Wirbatz's study compares two different teaching contexts: *EFL reading in CLIL and non CLIL primary schools: A comparison of classroom reading activities, learners' preferences and actual reading comprehension competences*. In the introduction, the authors present a description of EFL reading instruction in Germany and provide a detailed review of previous research. This section is useful as it frames the contexts quite elaborately and provides the reader with concrete suggestions as to which approach is the most beneficial and why.

The last chapter, by Glasser, *Scaffolding creative writing in the primary EFL classroom: Exploring the role of picture dictionaries and composition guidelines in the creation of Elfchen poems* provides a concrete teaching idea. Even if it is not very new, the study presents a playful idea which motivates young learners and unblocks their writing process.

The contributions in this book can be characterized by great methodological rigor. The texts present multiple perspectives without being contradictory and the different chapters "dialogue" and complement with one other providing a coherent perspective. The publication thus provides a rich contribution to the field of foreign language teaching and offers many necessary clues for those entering the field of teaching and assessing literacy skills.

