

A book Review

Teaching by Principles: an Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy,

H. Douglas Brown

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The following is excerpted from H. Douglas Brown, *Teaching by Principles: an Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*, 2nd ed., Addison-Wesley Longman, Inc., 2001. These excerpts are followed by some comments which I have tried to include in order to make things clearer to the reader.

Brown maintains that English language teaching has moved into a post-methodological era and that we, teachers, should base our pedagogy on principles that will “form the core of an approach to language teaching” (pp. 54-55). He has divided twelve principles into three categories: cognitive, affective, and linguistic. These categories are presented below along with Brown’s definitions or statements regarding the principles.

Cognitive Principles

Automaticity: «Efficient second language learning involves a timely movement of the control of a few language forms into the automatic processing

of a relatively unlimited number of language forms. Over analyzing language, thinking too much about its forms, and consciously lingering on rules of language all tend to impede this graduation to automaticity» (p. 56).

Meaningful Learning: «Meaningful learning will lead toward better long-term retention than rote learning» (p. 57). What Brown means by «meaningful learning» is using activities in class that target and incorporate students' needs, personal interests, and goals.

The Anticipation of Reward: “Human beings are universally driven to act, or ‘behave,’ by the anticipation of some sort of reward - tangible or intangible, short term or long term - that will ensue as a result of the behavior” (p. 58).

Intrinsic Motivation: «The most powerful rewards are those that are intrinsically motivated within the learner. Because the behavior stems from needs, wants, or desires within oneself, the behavior itself is self-rewarding; therefore, no externally administered reward is necessary» (p. 59). This statement seems to contradict the previous statement about «anticipation of reward». However, these statements are complementary, not exclusive.

Strategic Investment: “Successful mastery of the second language will be due to a large extent to a learner’s own personal ‘investment’ of time, effort, and attention to the second language in the form of an individualized battery of strategies for comprehending and producing the language” (p. 60).

Affective Principles

Language Ego: «As human beings learn to use a second language, they also develop a new mode of thinking, feeling, and acting—a second identity. The new ‘language ego’, intertwined with the second language, can easily create within the learner a sense of fragility, a defensiveness, and a raising of inhibitions» (p. 61).

Self-Confidence: «Learners’ belief that they indeed are fully capable of accomplishing a task is at least partially a factor in their eventual success in attaining the task» (p. 62).

Risk-Taking: «Successful language learners, in their realistic appraisal of themselves as vulnerable beings yet capable of accomplishing tasks, must be willing to become ‘gamblers’ in the game of language, to attempt to produce and to interpret language that is a bit beyond their absolute certainty» (p. 63).

The Language-Culture Connection: “Whenever you teach a language, you also teach a complex system of cultural customs, values, and ways of thinking,

feeling, and acting” (p. 64). . . . “Especially in ‘second’ language learning contexts, the success with which learners adapt to a new cultural milieu will affect their language acquisition success, and vice versa, in some possibly significant ways” (p. 65).

Linguistic Principles

The Native Language Effect: “The native language of learners exerts a strong influence on the acquisition of the target language system. While that native system will exercise both facilitating and interfering effects on the production and comprehension of the new language, the interfering effects are likely to be the most salient” (p. 66).

Interlanguage: “Second language learners tend to go through a systematic or quasi-systematic developmental process as they progress to full competence in the target language. Successful interlanguage development is partially a result of utilizing feedback from others” (p. 67).

Communicative Competence: “Given that communicative competence is the goal of a language classroom, instruction needs to point toward all its components: organizational, pragmatic, strategic, and psychomotor. Communicative goals are best achieved by giving the attention to language use and not just usage, to fluency and not just accuracy, to authentic language and contexts, and to students’ eventual need to apply classroom learning to previously unrehearsed contexts in the real world” (p. 69).