



Book reviews

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Barraca Mairal, J. (2018).

Aportaciones a una antropología de la unicidad. ¿Qué nos distingue y une a los humanos? [Contributions to an anthropology of uniqueness: what distinguishes and unites human beings?].

Dykinson: Madrid. 188 pp.

If I had to summarise my praise of this book in just three characteristics, I would simply note the ones that seem most relevant to me: simplicity, brevity, and clarity. This is a very easy to understand text, even for people who are uninitiated in philosophical anthropology, thanks to the simplicity of its language; its brevity makes it possible to read it in just a few hours; and it has clarity in the exposition of the most complicated anthropological content, a virtue attributed to good philosophers.

In my view, this work has two dimensions the author abides by and establishes a dialogue between that cut across it throughout its eleven different chapters: the uniqueness of the individual and what unites her with her peers or what

distinguishes her from those who are not her peers. This shows the author's honesty and, at the very least, the praiseworthy skill of being able to find a serendipitous title that does justice to the content as these dimensions are made explicit in the title and subtitle.

Many varied and well-structured topics emerge from the question of the human (corporeality, personal love, human relations, language and communication, work, culture, creativity, suffering and happiness) invoking the uniqueness of the individual while simultaneously bringing together and underlining the difference that distinguishes people.

In Barraca's work we see the pedigree of university educators who have given many hours of teaching and whose writing — inevitably — has the ability to make something inherently complex seem simple. This is very welcome, especially at the present time when iconic information is in competition with symbolic information in all settings.

Even though the author does not refuse to tackle the most controversial questions about what being human means, the reader feels energised and that she has grown as a person. Perhaps because it helps the reader be aware of how much she can still do in her life, insofar as she is a symbolic, creative, and free universe, responsible for herself and open to interpersonal encounters and to enrichment through giving-accepting.

Without trying to be exhaustive in this brief review, I would like to tell any potential readers of some of the subjects in the pages of this book. This choice of subject topics might be somewhat subjective, but it is what has captivated me: nature and culture, person and institutions, individual and society, socialisation and individuality, liberty and obligation, solitude and friendship, vulnerability and yearning to be more and better, contingency and transcendence.

Here, of course, the author has not attempted to present a confrontation between these terms but rather to integrate them. The pages of the book do not offer a dialectical exposition where problems are left unresolved and difficulties multiply and cloud the reader's mind in billows of empty smoke.

It is primarily a matter of contributing — as the title states — and not of taking away or, worse, sowing confusion among those who might try to enrich themselves with these contributions.

One notable example of what we have just mentioned is what happens with the social metamorphosis of values. Something that is happening suddenly and ver-

tiginously today. It is not a case of values “ceasing to be truly real and objective What changes in this case is our perception, a value judgment, regarding a certain good” (p. 101). Clearly, this change affects personal behaviour. Hence the importance of the current cultural relativism.

The author also criticises “imposition, syncretism, and cultural integration” that cause and shape mono-cultural homogenisation, until they “eliminate all diversity”. The choice we are instead offered is

the enriching equilibrium between the global and the local (global-local), between the universal and the particular (what is shared and what is different or cultural exception), between the close and the distant [because] they are crucial for the human being (p. 110).

The reason for this is that

the human being is ‘essentially cultural’. Our own nature or way of being is crucial. So, contrasting culture and human nature involves ignoring their intimate connection, their mutual and essential interaction. We are neither culture deprived of nature nor ‘a-cultural’ nature (p. 98).

Barraca deals with the fundamental anthropological core, without shying away from the most mysterious and problematic content, such as suffering and death. “The human being,” he writes,

knows it is mortal. ... Accordingly, the meaning of our mortal being takes on a very profound intensity. This is because death positions us in relation to our own limits, and the limits of a reality help us understand and define it (p. 175).

This positive concept of the limit helps expand rationalism. And this is something very positive for the person, without leading to an inane and illusory optimism. This is perhaps why the author claims that

the human being is not so much a being for death as for life, as it is a living being and is made to develop itself, unfold its existence over time. ... The knowledge of our innate mortality, experienced through our personal being, is not sterile or absurd, but can instead be fertile (p. 175).

On this point, the author takes the perspective of Thomas Mann, whom he cites: "Meditate on death, but be a friend of life".

For those who are perhaps tired of the excessive systematisation and rigidity of textbooks (which follow a strict order, a geometrical tradition), this publication offers an unavoidable and very welcome advantage: an appeal to fluidity and agility.

For example, we could note some of the basic concepts that appear and reappear most often in these pages, such as "openness", "interpersonal relationship" and "culture". It is not that they appear and disappear from the text like something that simply comes and goes.

Concepts emerge and are incorporated with ease when discourse or arguments require it. And the contents are not juxtaposed or added in accordance with a sudden caprice. Without being hidden or lost, they enter or leave as the course of the explanation or argument requires, giving this book freshness and vitality.

It has few citations and footnotes, and the ones it does have are very much in line with what is being argued and are necessary or unavoidable.

The Dykinson publishing house has produced a well presented text and has chosen ideal typefaces that invite one to read and make this easier. This is a very well prepared work in which it is hard to find any errors or typos, something which is very welcome.

In my opinion, this is a great short book, which can offer the reader a great deal and be very personally enriching.

Aquilino Polaino-Lorente ■

Bernal, A. (Ed.) (2019).

Formación continua [Continuous training]. Madrid: Síntesis. 216 pp.

There can be no doubt that economic globalisation and internationalisation have caused major educational and professional changes that have affected how our society is organised. Their impact is such that government authorities in various European countries have been obliged to propose educational reforms to provide education of the standard the global economy requires. These transformations, resulting from changes caused by factors such as technological innovation, the rigidity of corporate structures, the globalisation of markets, and the effects of the financial crisis, have required the definition of new models for participating in the employment market, or at least reconsideration of existing ones.

The ever more notable technological progress resulting from globalisation has made continuous training something of central importance in the development of organisations as it gives them a competitive advantage. On the one hand, this is because it makes an organisation's intellectual capital more flexible and prepares it to face the challenges of a constantly changing socioeconomic context. On the other hand, it develops the human capital of the organisation's assets, optimising the skills and competences their tasks require of them. This requires businesses to adapt to a flexible labour market resulting from changes that differ in nature and extent, and this market must accept the principle of competence, through which economic and productive activity and professional training itself must be planned.

Because of this, an increase has been observed in certain specific public policies intended to help develop continuous training, primarily based on increasing funding for it and its subsequent spread through the business fabric. So much so that continuous training, typified by the pursuit of lifelong learning and professional development to meet efficacy and modernisation objectives in a constantly changing society, is one of the main goals of public institutions.

Accordingly, the work reviewed here has systematic structure and analyses the development of continuous training in Spain, including some references to its development in the context of Europe, all from the perspective of overcoming

the technical change and market globalisation that tend to destabilise the productive system. It also emphasises how continuous training helps make the job market more flexible, not just as a way of improving the competitiveness of the economy but also as a resource for improving employability.

In the first chapter, the book's authors provide a definition of the concept of continuous training and list its distinguishing features, taking into account its current contextualisation in the European arena and offering an approach to it from the perspective of lifelong learning, without neglecting the implications for the concept of the sociocultural and work-related changes that characterise our current social model. The second chapter, in the shadow of the institutionalisation of continuous training, starts by considering the importance training has acquired as working environments have demanded it, in parallel with the development of knowledge about the nature, structure, and functions of organisations, in order to address the role of public continuous training policies in the Spanish and European settings as well as the current orientation of training in organisations.

The third chapter contains a summary of modalities and methodological focuses in the field of continuous training, describing the models that are currently most common in the business world and dwelling on analysis of the face-to-face and ICT-mediated modalities. It also sets out the methodological strategies that have to guide its planning.

In turn, chapter four, which focusses on the design and implementation of continuous training, condenses theoretical principles and guidelines for planning training programmes. In particular, it offers an initial approach to the question based on evaluating training needs and identifying priority techniques, sources, and criteria. Of course, planning is considered from the perspective of objectives, content, training strategies, resources, and certain basic guidelines that could be of interest. In this regard, the work refers to the transfer of the lessons planned in the implementation phase, describing this process by identifying basic premises and verifying suitable conditions for its planning.

Chapter five is dedicated to the professional profile of those responsible for continuous training, with a special mention for the question of professional identity. The authors provide a detailed description of functions, roles, and powers, as well as examining the dimensions, settings, and trends that characterise these professionals' training. The chapter ends by analysing dual professional training as another notable context for intervention, especially given its standing as a pedagogical intervention in organisations. Indeed, the analysis of this mode relating to its benefits is especially interesting, as the authors identify it as a good strategy for the potential employability of young people.

The authors end the work with an evaluation of continuous training, defining it as an excellent indicator of innova-

tion. Among other reasons, this is because it fosters awareness of the importance of continuous training, but also because it facilitates taking responsibility for achieving targets and considering certain elements for improving training activities. Therefore, if we want to provide valuable and useful information about achievements at the same time as designing processes for improvement relating to future decisions, we must evaluate not only the outcomes but also the implementation of each proposal.

It is hard to participate in a debate about continuous training without understanding it as a key instrument for confronting the challenges technological and economic globalisation have imposed on the relationship between qualifications and training. But there is no doubt that continuous training also faces major challenges, more than a few of which require coherent proposals that position it as a flexible tool for reacting coherently to the most pressing needs of companies and workers.

Ultimately, this is a well-argued work based on analysis of a type of training which, as well as positively affecting employability at a very good moment, also demands learning environments be designed that prepare workers for an ever more versatile and competitive labour market. Flexibility, functionality, efficiency and innovation are the new requirements of continuous training, which has undergone a notable development over the last decade, thanks both to the existence of public policies aimed at providing funding for it and

greater awareness in organisations as it is made a cornerstone of training their employees. In other words, the message here is to pay closer attention to the activities that, regardless of their type, contribute to training an organisation's personnel, recognising it as an effective tool that can respond to the real needs of the socio-economic setting in search of greater employability.

Jesús García Álvarez ■

Carrió-Pastor, M. L. (2019) (Eds.).

Teaching Language and Teaching Literature in Virtual Environments.

Singapur: Springer Nature Publishing.
xxi+293 pp.

The teaching and learning of English as a foreign language has shifted its approach and attention as a result of technological application. It has widely changed the practice of education in general as well as English language teaching in particular. It influences students' participation, the way the lesson is delivered, the way language is studied in and outside classroom, and it greatly improves the learning process and the relationship between the teacher and the students (Šafranĵ, 2013; Fuster & Clavel, 2010; Chambers & O'Sullivan, 2004). It has positive effects on learners' attitude, thinking skills, autonomous learning and their confidence building. Besides, information technology changed the traditional practice of language learning and teaching and provides a new type of literacy (Akyuz & Yavuz, 2015; Chambers

& O'Sullivan, 2004). Thus, technology assisted language learning has become the desired instructional tool in foreign and second language contexts.

The reviewed volume entitled teaching language and teaching literature in a virtual environment was published in 2019 by Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd. It provides a panoramic explanation of the practice and application of technology in teaching English language and literature and learning English in foreign language context, and it covers a wider technological concepts and applications in foreign language contexts.

The volume is composed of four parts with 15 individual chapters. The first part deals with methodology design for second language teaching in virtual environments and is composed of five chapters. This part starts with the work of Horn-Cheliz and Sarasa-Cabezuelo. The authors dedicate the role of information technology to teaching vocabulary skills. They also introduce a theoretical model "parasitic model" for acquiring second language vocabulary. Furthermore, they address the main difficulties for learning vocabulary and strategies to overcome the difficulties. The second chapter of part I by Giglio reports the practice of oral production skills in E-learning contexts. It aims to reflect on the role of activities and tools used to practice oral skills in the context of foreign language education. Accordingly, distance learning, online foreign language teaching and related issues are covered. The third chapter is about language learning in the virtual world by B. Lech and N. Harris.

The authors introduce language learning models such as usage based learning and constructivism learning theory and their relation with online learning and learners' autonomy. They claim that learners learn language skills while they participate in usage events. Furthermore, they also explain informal learning and the online approach to informal learning. The purpose of chapter four is to explore the best practices in the use of augmented and virtual reality technologies for second language acquisition by Scrivner, Madewell, Buckley, & Perez. The main purpose of this chapter was to indicate the role of immersive technology for foreign language teaching and learning. The authors of this chapter introduce various kinds of immersive technologies such as aurasma, thinkLink:web 2.0 and Google Cardboards. They also explain how to design, implement and evaluate these kinds of virtual reality technologies.

The fifth chapter is about integrating 'talk abroad' into an intermediate foreign language course: building learner autonomy and engagement through video conversations with native speakers by M. Sama and Wu. This was aimed at examining the efficacy and best practice in integrating a video-synchronous computer mediated communication tool 'talk abroad' into an intermediate foreign language course. The authors reported that by implementing this strategy, students showed increasing autonomy in linguistic development and self-regulated learning strategies.

The second part is about tools for second/foreign language teaching in virtual environments, and it covers from chapter

6 to chapter 9. Hence, the chapter starts with the work of Milojkovic, teaching English by skype: theoretical and practical considerations from the perspective of Serbian English teachers. In this chapter, the author stated that digital technologies play a great role in foreign language teaching and learning. It is proved that Skype is a potential tool for facilitating foreign language learning in a relaxing environment.

The sixth chapter is about frame Net as a resource for teaching Spanish as a foreign language by Jodar-Sanchez. The author elaborates how to teach vocabulary, grammar and metaphors via frame Net in foreign language context. The purpose of the eighth chapter is to explain how to use telecollaboration to develop soft skills in higher education foreign language programs, and it is recommended that higher education instructors be must be aware of new technology to facilitate communication that improve competency in the learners' future job. Chapter nine is about a comparative analysis of two online video conferencing initiatives for conversational practice with native speakers by Echevarria. The author describes and comparatively analyses two online videoconferencing initiatives carried out in Spanish courses.

The third part is about specific second language teaching in virtual environments. This chapter is started by the work of Losey-Leon and Balderas, Cognitive approach to adaptive testing implementation in virtual Maritime English language learning environment based on a spaced

repetition system. Ribeiro, Morgado, Gaspar and Regio explain teacher training for CLIL in higher education through blended learning. The chapter elaborates the challenges in planning, preparation, implementation and results of blended learning courses in teacher training. The other chapter is about project-based learning in a virtual classroom: the case of English for tourism communication by Penalver. Hence, the author states that problem based learning that makes use of technology is an effective way to enhance student motivation and foster their thinking skills to progressively move towards the understanding of specific problems.

The purpose of the fourth part is to describe literature teaching in virtual environments. In this part, three main issues are discussed. These are digital storytelling in teacher training; development of basic competences, creativity and multimodal literacy, teaching poetry through songs in a virtual environment; from students' reluctance to their quiescence and reflection, analysis and language practice; from individual critical thinking to collaborative learning using blogs in a literature class are discussed by Ibarra-Rius and Ballester-Roca, Penalver and Lopa, and Giral and Murray respectively. These researchers explore how technology can be a valuable resource for story telling in teacher education, for teaching poetry and for individual and critical thinking and collaborative learning.

This volume introduces various types of technologies that can be used in foreign language teaching classrooms. The read-

ers can get various perspectives that are possible to apply in foreign and second language contexts. Hence, the book can be a good resource for foreign language teachers, educators and researchers who are interested in considering technology for teaching language and literature. In addition, it can also be a valuable resource for scholars with an interest in technology, language teaching and literature teaching. The author uses pictures, graphics and images that make the book much more interactive and practical in language classrooms. The chapter starts with clear and informative abstracts and reference books are provided at the end of each chapter. I would like to comment that, although the book is interesting to read, I have observed that some chapters lack intensive arguments and detailed explanations. Despite this shortcoming, this informative and practical volume has achieved its purpose and can make a practical contribution to teaching language and literature via technology.

Amare Tesfie ■

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Chiva-Bartoll, O. & Gil-Gómez, J. (2018) (Eds.).

Aprendizaje-servicio universitario: Modelos de intervención e investigación en la formación inicial docente [University service-learning: Intervention and research models in initial teacher training]. Barcelona: Octaedro. 165 pp.

For just over a decade, Spanish universities have been very actively involved in projects regarding innovation in teaching. University teaching staff have gradually started to use different active methodologies in the teaching-learning process and have come to realise the value of experiential methodologies beyond subjects focussing on curriculum practices. In addition, they have gradually taken into account the important opportunities for research that different ideas for innovation in university classrooms have provided. The consolidation, at the international level, of academic journals from the first quartile of SSCI (Web of Science) and SCOPUS that focus on publishing studies based on higher education is proof of this. These include *Internet and Higher Education*, *Journal of Engineering Education*, *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, *Journal of Higher Education*, *Research in Higher Education*, and *Studies in Higher Education* among many others. None of the Spanish academic journals from the field of education listed in these two databases focus solely on higher education, but a growing number of articles with this keyword can be observed. The periodic celebration of academic conferences and symposia focussing on teaching research in univer-

sity institutions has also been consolidated, some of them already having a very well-known trajectory.

At the same time, we are seeing a change in outlook among university teachers. While research has traditionally been regarded as more valuable than teaching, and the study, analysis and reflection on the methodologies used in the classroom have not been given the importance they merit, this focus has gradually been changing. The key element in this change is the evidence that research and innovation in these educational scenarios are not competing activities but instead feed back into one other, as Chiva-Bartoll and Gil-Gómez note. Innovation in teaching in universities, in this case, is — and indeed must be — supported by research, while at the same time it enriches and consolidates ideas and processes for innovation.

This context is, in most Spanish universities, leading to the creation of teaching innovation groups that provide a very fertile ground for new ideas, which will eventually improve educational practice in higher education institutions. One clear example of this is the R&D project “Service-learning and life stories in the training of future primary teachers: methodological innovation in a public university” – INNOVA+3”, launched by the authors of this book, both of whom are lecturers at the Universitat Jaume I. They start from the idea that university teaching cannot be approached from a single methodological perspective, nor can quality teaching advance without analysing the processes and results obtained to validate, improve, modify, etc.,

teaching strategies. This is why they believe it is “a fundamental principle that research should provide the foundations for endorsing or validating the introduction of methodologies in teaching” (p. 122), which is why Chiva-Bartoll and Gil-Gómez set up this INNOVA+3 project. The strands that define it, collected in the book we review here, are apparent in:

- The use of active and experiential methodologies, especially, service-learning.
- The training of teachers.
- The involvement of different modules in this educational action.
- Direct service in an adult training centre (Centro de Formación de Personas Adultas – CEPA).

Within this framework, they propose strengthening the construction of teacher identity in primary-school teaching students on the basis of studying and reflecting on the situational experiences that they provide.

INNOVA+3 intends to contribute to its progress, to generate the ideal framework for experiencing the situations that make them grow as teachers. Service-learning, on the basis of its open and social conception, facilitates experimentation in educational situations that also lead to improvements for the community. All of this, combined with appropriate pedagogical techniques, forms the ideal breeding ground for their status as a teacher to emerge and solidify, in other words, for their defining identity as an educator to emerge (p. 123).

This book, resulting from the progress of this project, intends to contribute to the training of university teachers and so includes a wealth of active and experiential methodologies, in particular the service-learning methodology in universities, aimed not only at training teaching skills as future education professionals but also at civic training and training in social responsibility. To this end, the authors have written a very clear and well-structured work, thinking especially of those teachers, students, or people interested in educational topics, who have never had contact with service-learning. It is arranged in three sections, the first of which covers the strands that underpin and develop questions about what, how, where, why, who, etc., defines any service-learning proposal. They apply experience of the teaching-learning process to specific professional situations in which the construction of knowledge is fostered through the theory-practice interaction. At the same time, the authors provide the context of the origins and development of this methodology, helping the reader understand and better assess its richness and influence. We should note that the authors have not taken this point as far as they could. They have left out other teaching and research innovation groups that are developing service-learning projects in Spain's universities, as well as the support a very wide range of institutions are providing by encouraging and recognising these initiatives. That said, we do see it as an approach to an emerging reality that is undoubtedly becoming consolidated.

Furthermore, the impact of these methodologies on the social dimension is very interesting, emphasising the social responsibility and social enterprise dimensions. It is right to insist on teaching as one of the main strands of academic activity, on the basis of which the socially responsible reaction by universities is strengthened. They underline the position that “service-learning includes, from the curricular and educational aspect, a strong dedication to social transformation that enables the university to connect with society and work to resolve shared problems” (p. 63). At the same time, they direct the gaze of service-learning towards social enterprise, enabling the identification of the specific characteristics of a teacher with a socially enterprising personality, noting that “with the methodological innovation proposed through service-learning the necessary and ideal conditions are established for students to develop these features and others” (p. 78). It is not easy to find these dimensions in the literature on service-learning, and so it would be desirable to include them, interweaving them with the social dimension in this dual aspect.

The second section of this work considers research. The editors emphasised at the start the need to interweave innovation with teaching and research, and this is more than just an assertion as they dedicate this second section to research in service-learning. They provide an overview of the research and research groups that currently focus on this topic, showing its dynamism. They provide guidance for approaching this type of study, dedicating

one chapter specifically to the application of qualitative methods and another to quantitative methods in this type of project. The aim of this is to be able to evaluate and assess, with objective data, the impacts of the experiences implemented, which ultimately affect the quality of our students’ teaching and learning. However, they also note the limitations of this type of research, even though they believe its benefits easily outweigh the weaknesses they mention.

Service-learning is an inherently complex phenomenon and so research into it can be approached in many ways. Each focus makes it possible to uncover different types of information, which, along with appropriate implementation of service-learning, will undoubtedly enable us to continue to unravel and better understand all of the inherent possibilities of this pedagogical method (p. 116).

The third part of this book presents specific experiences developed in the framework of the INNOVA+3 project. They list as specific examples service-learning programmes implemented in the primary teacher training programmes at Universitat Jaume I. The idea of which, as the authors note, is that

advancing in teacher training is essential if we are to improve the educational system and, by extension, society. Implementing service-learning encourages different learning dynamics to those found in traditional classrooms. If this is combined with the social improvement produced, it makes a decisive contribution to the creation of more effective and involved teaching identities (p. 131).

This aim is undoubtedly fully achieved. The authors successfully lead the reader, in a straightforward way, in knowledge of this active methodology, encouraging reflection on teaching practice in our university classrooms. And, above all, encouraging us to broaden our perspectives in our teaching and research activities, promoting the necessary social dimension of our efforts to train future educational professionals.

Marta Ruiz-Corbella ■