Donald Kiraly. *A Social Constructivist Approach to Translator Education: Empowerment from Theory Practice.* Manchester/Northampton: St. Jerome, 2000. 207 pp.

Donald Kiraly states in his introduction to *A Social Constructivist Approach to Translator Education* that translator trainers receive little or no education in translation teaching methods. Instead they are placed in institutions

and asked to attend classes taught by their older colleagues for ideas on how to educate. With Kiraly's fifteen years as a German translator educator at the School of Applied Linguistics and Cultural Studies of the University of Mainz in Germersheim, Germany, he experienced this first hand and decided to develop a "systematic and humanistic approach to the training of translators". Kiraly's mission in this book is to present a teaching method that other professors can adopt, varying its applications as necessary. The method of teaching translators that Kiraly developed is known as a social constructivist approach, which is derived from his idea that "people have no choice but to create or construct meanings and knowledge through participation in the interpersonal, intersubjective interaction." In other words, knowledge is constructed both by social/interpersonal activity and through cognitive/personal thinking processes.

Kiraly also mentions in his introductory chapter that knowledge is *constructed by learners*, rather than simply transmitted to them by their teachers. Here Kiraly notes a shift in authority, giving the student responsibility and control in the education process, an important concept on which Kiraly did his doctoral dissertation, which was published in 1995 as *Pathways to Translation.* For Kiraly, personal experience makes each person interpret and understand things uniquely. Language, he says, is our only common means of interpretation that enables communication. Throughout the eight sections of *A Social Constructivist Approach to Translator Education,* he uses the definition of teaching method as proposed by Richards and Rodgers (1986) with its three elements of **approach**, **design** and **procedures** to serve as a framework for his theory.

In sections two and three he defines non-foundational social-constructivist ideas which he has used as guidelines in his own teaching approach. In section two he proposes several modules of education known as **transmissionist models**. He uses these models to contrast an objective standpoint in education from a social constructivist standpoint. In section three he presents actual principles underlying different classroom approaches. A few examples are **collaborative/co-operative learning**, **the zone of proximal development**,

scaffolding and **socio-cognitive apprenticeship**.

Chapters four, five and six focus on three different models of classroom techniques. In chapter four he focuses on transmissionist teaching techniques, which concern the transfer of knowledge from those who know more to those who know less. There are three basic modes of transmissionist education: lecture, exercise class and seminar. These three differ in the amount of participation students have in the learning process. Lecture involves the least amount of student work and seminar involves the most, since students do research and orally present their findings in class. These methods of teaching are highly ineffective in a translation classroom because the student needs to learn through translating. In this chapter, he makes mention of Christine Nord's **practice-oriented method**, which is a method of instruction, that for Kiraly, uses principles similar to those of social constructivism.

Kiraly further discusses classroom techniques in chapters five and six. In chapter five, he presents a how-to on implementing a social constructivist classroom. He presents his discussion with his students the first day of each semester, telling them that the translation class is a collaborative, in that he will assist them in understanding the theories and practices of translation, but tells them that they will be responsible for learning as well. Then he has the students introduce themselves to an individual nearby, having them share a personal bit of information that they will then present to the rest of the class. This sharing of information develops trust and a sense of community that will be important to the group dynamic. He then executes a series of student workshops and discusses other collaborative student assignments. Assignments range from in-class partnered translation (where students translate a work and compare and contrast works) to having students create questions for exams. These assignments will teach students how to work as members of a professional team and show the students that they are competent learners, contributing a great deal to the class.

Chapter six treats planning and implementing a translation exercise class. Kiraly presents a study he did on a translation class, comprised of 24 students (four males and twenty females). In this study, for which students were translating from their

mother language into a foreign tongue in a specific classroom setting, students worked in small groups and the class was given a chapter of a book to translate. Kiraly, by means of this case study, presents a student-empowering model of classroom learning in which the professor works as a facilitator, understanding archetypal student roles for collaborative work, mediating peer editing, and developing "techniques for focusing on sub-skills involved in the translation process." (Kiraly, 122)

Chapter seven departs from the focus of much of the book by bringing in a new classroom complication: the computer. Kiraly sees computers as a useful tool to both the translator and the translator trainer especially with recent declines in cost. In this chapter, he focuses on creating and executing a constructivist computer-based classroom. He presents models of classrooms with either networked workstations for each student or having a single overhead projector linked to one computer. A multi-computer classroom helps the students acquire skills relating to computer-based translation research and gives the instructor the ability to shift the focus of the class more readily. Within the computer classroom, Kiraly presents different types of instructional techniques, ranging from communication between teacher and any number of students, to communication between groups of students with the teacher acting as moderator, to autonomous learning.

Chapters eight and nine complement the previous five chapters by setting up guidelines for student assessment and discussing second language acquisition in the classroom. Chapter eight focuses on bookkeeping and assessment standards in a constructivist classroom. It discusses exams, papers and evaluation. Chapter nine concerns itself with second language acquisition in the classroom, discussing methods of teaching, of evaluating student language competency and of creating case studies.

The ultimate goal of the translator trainer, according to Kiraly in *A Social Constructivist Approach to Translator Education: Empowerment from Theory Practice*, is translator competence. The classroom setting is an ever-changing environment to which students and teachers bring their personal experience and approaches to learning/teaching. The advantages of a social constructivist approach

in a translation classroom include student involvement and ownership over the work they create as they build skills through interaction with a facilitating instructor and a supportive network of classmates.

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