

Special Issue

Symbolic Competence: From Theory to Pedagogical Practice

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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

It is with immense pleasure that I present to you this special issue of the *L2 Journal* on “Symbolic Competence: From theory to pedagogic practice,” guest edited by William Heidenfeldt and Kimberly Vinall. This special issue has been a magnificent labor of love. When, in preparation for my retirement from UC Berkeley in April 2015, the Berkeley Language Center community contemplated putting together a Festschrift in my honor, my colleagues, my graduate students and I agreed that a conference would be a much better idea - one that reflected more appropriately the intense intellectual exchanges we had had together over the years. That conference titled “ClaireFest” took place on 17-18 April 2015 in Dwinelle Hall. It offered a host of exciting scholarly papers, moving testimonies of professional teachers, and heart-warming stories of experience. But the idea of having something in print to commemorate the event remained. Thanks to Rick Kern, the director of the BLC, the idea of having a special issue of the *L2 Journal* dedicated to Claire Kramersch’s concept of symbolic competence started to take shape. Billy and Kimberly, who were finishing their PhD dissertations at the time (Heidenfeldt, 2015a; Vinall 2015), eagerly picked up the challenge. Kimberly had already published two articles on the application of symbolic competence in her Spanish classes (Vinall, 2012, 2016); Billy had published an article on one Spanish teacher with a particularly high degree of symbolic competence (Heidenfeldt, 2015b). Both had been seduced by the concept proposed by Claire in 2006, but were still looking for various ways to put it in practice in the classroom. Their Call for Papers met with widespread enthusiasm and they had a large number of abstracts to choose from. Framed by an enlightening Introduction and a thought-provoking Afterword, the four papers presented here constitute an honest appraisal of the notion of symbolic competence and its practical applications in the language classroom.

I wish to extend to Billy and Kimberly my most heartfelt thanks for having undertaken this demanding project, despite heavy teaching loads at their respective institutions. They have definitely clarified my initially attractive, but elusive brainchild, and given it a concrete and practical meaning. I hope that our readers find this special issue useful for both their research and their teaching practice, and that they are encouraged to further explore how symbolic competence can enrich the teaching and learning of foreign languages.

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