

Foreign Languages in Elementary School (FLES): J.E.T.T. Salutes Kay J. Doran and FLES

Editorial Note: The Editors of *J.E.T.T.* acknowledge the many men and women who teach foreign languages in elementary school. In recognition of the contributions FLES teachers make to the field of foreign language education, we would like to share with our readers the experiences of Kay J. Doran who—*together with her FLES classes*—“reviewed” Spanish language materials from the National Textbook Company for *J.E.T.T.* The following *J.E.T.T.* Conversation is based on the responses of the people in the foreign language classroom who count: teachers like Kay J. Doran and students like the ones in her classes who worked with the NTC materials. For the review of the following materials, *J.E.T.T.* suspends its usual JETTSPOTLIGHT format and talks with Kay J. Doran.

Suzanne Lindenau: During my tenure as *J.E.T.T.* Editor, it has been my privilege to meet many foreign and second language teachers whose dedication to language teaching and learning is truly remarkable and exemplary. A growing number of these dedicated men and women whom I have met at national and international language conferences and meetings have volunteered their services as readers and reviewers for this publication. Not only is *J.E.T.T.* well-served by its readers and reviewers but, so too, are the publishers whose instructional materials these readers and reviewers evaluate. Not long ago, I sent Kay J. Doran a number of Spanish materials which she and her classes

“tried out.” I find Kay’s comments, observations, and suggestions—together with the responses of her classes—insightful, revealing, and useful. I take this opportunity to thank Kay Doran and Heather, Derek, Rawoenes, Jeremy, Melissa, Davey, Jenny, Andy, Andrea, Amanda, and Ray for making FLES the best foundation for communicative competence.

A Conversation with Kay J. Doran

J.E.T.T.: Overall Kay, what did you think about this project?

Kay: I enjoyed doing this project and my students enjoyed the materials when it was possible for them to be a part of things...My general suggestion would be that publishers provide you at *J.E.T.T.* with classroom or multiple sets of materials. For example, *Viva el Español!* and *Looking at Spanish Cities* would have been much more accurately tested if I had had multiple copies.

J.E.T.T.: Since you mentioned *Viva el Español!*, what are your thoughts about its format, content, and value as classroom material?

Kay: The format is truly excellent, colorful, and interesting because the media is varied. The content of this package has excellent breadth, scope, and sequence. The teaching manual is useful because it provides a wealth of material, especially for inexperienced teachers. But, because the program allows for change and

creativity, even experienced teachers will find it inspiring. Although this is an excellent program for elementary grades, I find that there are possibilities here for its use with upper grade levels as well.

On a personal note, I would love to use this program for my elementary classes. Initially, it is expensive, but I am suggesting purchase of this program by our CESA district consortium. Since I am the only FLES teacher, I have my doubts that it will be purchased. I may try to buy it a unit at a time.

J.E.T.T.: Is this the perfect FLES program with no need for improvements?

Kay: My only suggestion for improvement would be the use of children's *real* voices on the tapes instead of the artificial puppet/animal voices. These are entertaining, but I prefer to use more realistic accents and pronunciation *right from the start*. Related to this suggestion is delivery: a normal rate of delivery would be better (at times, the rate on the tapes is very slow). Children are such excellent mimics; they should have and need realistic models to develop good pronunciation habits right from the beginning of their foreign language study.

J.E.T.T.: Periodically, we send dictionaries out for review. Most of us have a favorite dictionary. How did the *Spanish and English Dictionary, Cervantes-Walls* fare with you and your classes?

Kay: Although overall the dictionary is easy to read—good size type—and has no excess supplemental material, I wonder how durable it will be over the long run. The vocabulary is up-to-date and expansive enough to provide the words needed for essay work. This is important for me since I require weekly creative or essay writing from my students. This dictionary got a great deal of use while it was on the shelf with our other dictionaries. I think my students preferred the softcover; for a permanent classroom purchase, however, I think I would check out the hardcover version. Students like books that are lightweight. This may be a selling point for individual purchase of dictionaries. I am in the process of deciding which dictionaries are

suitable for permanent use in my classroom. I may ask for copies of this and the hardcover version; the price is right.

J.E.T.T.: What about *Looking at Spanish Cities* by Dekovic? How useful is a book like this—entirely in English?

Kay: Students who visited Spain in our 1988 tour were impressed with the content of this book; they found the questions thought-provoking and very good. I, too, found the format most useful: The photographs are excellent; the text is clearly printed; and, it looks like it would be fairly durable. What would make this book truly wonderful would be if the text were in Spanish or Spanish and English. Like many language teachers today, I prefer to teach the “culture” via the target language. As the book is now, it makes for interesting reading, but as a pedagogical tool, it can be nothing more than a supplemental or free-time reading exercise. If the text were in Spanish, I, for example, could make it a valuable addition to my regular text; were it in Spanish, I would use it often. As supplemental material for free-time reading, it is not only too expensive but also pedagogically ineffective for teaching culture via the target language.

J.E.T.T.: When we receive books from publishers, we look at them and often wonder how teachers like you will respond to them. As those of us who have been and are in the language classroom know, teaching materials may look very attractive and usable in theory but they often do not prove to work as well in practice. We thought *Spanish for Beginners* of the Passport's Language Guide series from NTC looked like it could be an excellent text to use in teaching Spanish in the classroom.

Kay: Not only is *Spanish for Beginners* a visually appealing book—colorful illustrations, lots of variety in printing styles—but it has a quality teachers like me have come to value: This book is sturdy. Although I tried this book out with one of my third grade Spanish classes as supplemental reading, the content is challenging enough for older students as well. Students liked this book (as you can see by the attached usage chart). I feel confident that this book could be used in conjunction with a regular text on higher

levels—even junior high. This would be a valuable addition to any classroom or central library.

J.E.T.T.: *The Spanish Picture Dictionary* by Wilkes, King, Oria, and Root is one of our personal favorites. It seemed to us that teachers could do all kinds of things with this “show-and-tell” approach. How did your students respond to it?

Kay: As is true of a number of the books from NTC that I received from you for review, the *Spanish Picture Dictionary* is replete with appealing illustrations, colorful depictions, and, yes, excellent binding. This book will hold up, I think. What is particularly rewarding about the content of this book is that the vocabulary is the vocabulary younger students ask for; the sentences in which this vocabulary is imbedded appeal to young learners because they are relevant to life. There is no doubt in my mind that this book would be an excellent choice for the classroom or the central library. I see no reason why it could not be used by upper grades—possibly even junior high school students.

J.E.T.T.: How did the *Vox Diccionario Escolar de la Lengua Español* fare?

Kay: I would love to have this for my personal library, and I think my more advanced students would probably enjoy it if they had easy access to it. Except for some “brief” looks, my younger students largely ignored this book. Some thought it to be interesting, but generally, they did not use it with great enthusiasm.

J.E.T.T.: In addition to the materials from the National Textbook Company, we sent you *Al corriente*, the Marks and Blake text published by Random House. If implemented, your suggestion that publisher send *J.E.T.T.* multiple copies of those language materials that teachers like you are willing to “try out” on your classes would certainly reveal a “truer” and more accurate picture of how the materials “play in the classroom.” Similarly, we have asked publishers to send us *all* the materials that comprise a particular language “package,” so that our reviewers can evaluate the materials both separately and as an integrated whole. If

implemented, this approach should result in better and more useful reviews. In the case of *Al corriente*, we sent what we received: the text. Random House sends us all the materials available at the time. However, as we know, all the materials are often not available at the same time. Rather than wait, we sent you the text only. Also available with this book are the following: Cuaderno de ejercicios escritos/Manual de laboratorio, computer software, Instructor’s Manual, tapescript, tapes, and resource kit. It is an intermediate Spanish text of 446 pages, copyright 1989. What are your overall impressions of the quality of this book as an instructional tool?

Kay: This text clearly defines the objectives of oral proficiency, and I find the level of difficulty to be suitable for intermediate college students. The information in the text is up-to-date and will stand the test of a few years. The drawings are humorous and can serve as excellent stimulants to conversation; although the photographs are generally good, color would have made them much more appealing. Although the exercises in this text are effective, they are too brief. The workbook would have been most useful at this point in helping me decide if more exercises are needed. Exercises are designed in such a way that they allow for the application of language concepts. The review sections supplement previous learning; the Gramática en contexto sections of this text are very good.

The directions in this text are clearly stated *in Spanish* which I find to be very good. Also very well-done are the drawings: My class and I loved them. Having used portions of this text with my classes, I feel it promotes oral proficiency; it functions as the authors intended. I would very much like to have a complete complement of all the elements that comprise this program (the workbook and tapes are necessary for an accurate evaluation). I do not believe one can judge a foreign language program without the whole package—all the elements that belong to it—any more than one can teach the program if one only has a portion of the materials.

J.E.T.T.: We have always encouraged publishers to send us all the components that comprise a particular language program. If

Publishers like Random House and the National Textbook Company have been very good about sending us what is available at a particular time. Often workbooks, audio tape programs, computer software, etc. are not complete and available with a new textbook. In our attempts to share with our readers information about the latest practices and products for today's language learning, we have a choice: We can wait until all items in a package are available (that can take

months) or send out for review what is available. Or we can hope that the day will come when all items in a language package will be available at the same time, so that when publishers send us the whole package, we can send them to our reviewers in the field.

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