

Between worlds: Access to second language acquisition.

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## Between Worlds: Access to Second Language Acquisition (Second Edition)

March 2002 — Volume 5, Number 4

### Between Worlds: Access to Second Language Acquisition (Second Edition)

David E. Freeman & Yvonne S. Freeman

Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

(2001)

Pp. xv + 303

ISBN 0-325-00350-5

To publish a second edition of a book does not simply mean an editorial success (number one is important, that the foundations and underlying philosophy of the book has caused a consensus among teachers of English language learners.

The first edition came out in 1994 and, since then, the ultimate recipients –that is, school leavers and evolution. Even though U.S. is a country in which immigration has been the source of second language acquisition and, consequently, the number of second language learners has rocketed to increase in states such as California, Florida, Illinois, New York and Texas. [\[1\]](#)

I have read and reviewed the book with both pleasure and academic enthusiasm. It has been a pleasure to read a book which impregnates the whole book; enthusiasm comes from my own experience as a language teacher in countries such as Spain where languages have been taught only as foreign languages; nowadays with the increase of immigration and we are also beginning to teach languages—Spanish, in this case—as second languages to second immigrant learners.

Just before moving to the content of the book, I would like to point out a couple of positive aspects. The book is devoted to teach students how to live successfully between their own language and world. The students are described as English learners, instead of the old non-politically correct L2 learners because, in fact, many of them are adding the third or fourth language to their repertoire.

Chapter 1 is a delightful account of case studies. They are conducted in order to present what happens in their learning process. Each case study depicts a real student, in a real school setting and with a real background. The chapter describes a rich variety of cases: Hispanic and Asian immigrants, etc. The *analysis*, which is provided for each case, tries to explain in a detailed manner the reasons for their success, paying considerable attention to the background they come from and the one they are immersed in. For example, the description of those teenagers who fled El Salvador and saved their lives.

The following chapter makes an interesting description of the issues and circumstances that affect language performance. For this purpose, it reports the professional life of a teacher, who has experienced a variety of posts and teaching methodology along her career. The key factor to learn from all those cases is the following words: “that theory informs practice, and reflection on practice can shape a teacher’s work.” The typology of learners (as a plant, builder or explorer) that results from the views that teachers have on language learning is going to become the main character around which the whole book is organized.

Chapter 3 relies on the typology of learners outlined above and tries to explain how learners behave as explorers. The underlying idea for the entire chapter is that learning is an active process that involves collaboration with others. It relies heavily on Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development as well as on Piaget’s and scientific concepts. Krashen’s notions of language acquisition and language learning are also used throughout the chapter.

The next two chapters, 4 and 5, provide the reader with a theoretical background about language learning. The distinction between competence and performance to move to what communicative competence is, “to say the right thing in a certain social situation” (p. 62). Chapter 4 closes with the description of the components to comprehend and produce the target language. Chapter 5 is devoted to the “principal theoretical issues in SLA.” The difference between theoretical and applied research is made clear and the author shows how theoretical and applied research are on the basis of SLA theory. The chapter heavily relies on Krashen’s monitor model to end up by explaining how language acquisition takes place in the classroom.

The sixth chapter of the book insists on the typology of explorers and it describes how teachers learn the language. The chapter is abundant in delightful recollections on classroom experiences (p. 117), and also in illustrations of end products of students' work.

The following chapters, 7 and 8, go deeply into the idea of how explorer teachers try to make learning styles and by celebrating their first language and culture. Cooperative learning is presented in various situations for second language acquisition. It is pointed out (p. 129) how important heterogeneous groups are. The same conclusion was found on foreign language students when being grouped for project work. It is a resourceful mechanism for making students interact and acquire the language.

Being aware of the importance of the first language helps both teachers and learners in the second language. Examples are provided in chapter 8 on how to make the best use of the L1, such as using it for preview and closing (p. 152-153). It consists of using the L1 for preview and closing and closing again with the L1 to summarize the key ideas and raise questions on the lesson.

Chapters 9 through 12 are less on SLA and more on education. In fact this section of the book reminds me of the call-to-action which was defended by the school district I worked for "closing the gap", which made reference to the distance between the achievement of White and Afro-American students. [-2-]

Chapter 10 exemplifies the two types of orientation schools can follow: intercultural or assimilationist. The "melting pot" and the "salad bowl" metaphors respectively. In the first one, every student loses his individuality, language and culture; in the second one, every student is like the vegetables but keeping its taste. No doubt, the explorer type of teaching and learning advocates intercultural orientation of the school.

Chapter 11 tries to offer solutions for involving parents in school life. Those schools which try to make the effort to close the existing gap between the parents' beliefs and expectations and their children; it is just a question of making two worlds understand each other.

The book closes with a chapter that proposes classroom-based research as a tool for teachers based on classroom data and the authors end up with the hope that "other teachers will copy their results, so that all of us can continue to grow our understanding of how best to promote learning, especially for those living between worlds" (p. 285).

At this point, some of the positive aspects of the book are as follows: I have liked the section *Applications*, which tries to put theory into practice with reasonable and easy-to-do activities as the titles of chapters because, in my opinion, they involve the reader and make him create his own chapter. Finally, the websites appendix is also another success of the book.

I have not liked the abundant number of references to publications from the eighties and the book. Sometimes, some references are missing, as for example, a traditional article, C competence; or a more recent one, Wallace (1998), on action research.

There is also a lack of quantitative data; of course, case studies provide an enormous amount of data on the learners themselves, but language acquisition is not measured in any way. Therefore, the subtitle (*Access to second language acquisition*) does not correspond very much to the content of the book, which is a book for the teacher who has to make his best with a multicultural and diverse body of students.

In closing, I would recommend the book because of the wise manner it responds to a reality. As a consequence, schools are not monolithic in terms of population any more and the book reflects the different worlds that conform it.

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## End Notes

[1] This figure is taken from the Introduction (p. x).

[2] Montgomery County Public Schools, Maryland. You can learn more on the call-to-action page.

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